

“THE TRUE STORY OF SEVEN STRANGERS PICKED TO HAVE THEIR LIVES
TAPED”: STUDYING RACE AS CONSTRUCTED ON REALITY TELEVISION

A Dissertation

by

JANIE FILOTEO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Sociology

“The True Story of Seven Strangers Picked to Have Their Lives Taped”: Studying Race
as Constructed on Reality Television

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Sarah N. Gatson
Committee Members,	Rogelio Saenz
	Wendy Leo Moore
	Leroy Dorsey
Head of Department,	Mark Fossett

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ABSTRACT

“The True Story of Seven Strangers Picked to Have Their Lives Taped”: Studying Race
as Constructed on Reality Television. (August 2011)

Janie Filoteo, B.A., Our Lady of the Lake University;

M.A., Our Lady of the Lake University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Sarah N. Gatson

The present work examines the construction of race on reality television through the use of an exemplar in this genre, MTV’s *The Real World*. By the sheer fact of its popularity and ubiquity, as *The Real World* is nearly two decades old and is the longest-running example of the genre, reality television programming warrants deeper academic investigation. The present work argues that as we are consuming mass media, we are also consuming specific ideas about our social world. These ideas inform audiences and are necessary to uncover in order to learn about the social structure of our racialized society. Findings reveal race and ethnicity is embedded in our culture and how this show has communicated race through its depiction and even exclusion. Further, findings reveal that racial and ethnic relations are most often depicted as a “Black versus White” issue.

The current work focuses specifically on the construction of race because of the similarly ubiquitous nature of race in society. Because *The Real World* is a long-running series, it provides an ample database from which to sample for a discourse analysis. The

show is marketed and viewed by a specific target audience such that it allows for the exploration of one of the research arguments: that we must continue to rethink and challenge our view that mass media audience members, specifically here television, are passive consumers of material. The present work seeks to extend the application of theoretical contributions of Hall, Morley, Ang, and Jenkins by applying models to a type of programming that complicates the vision of media where consumers and producers are identifiably different spheres. The field of reality television programming is unique because of its dependence on viewers to become cast members and participants in the media production process. Finally, as previous research has shown, even in fictional settings viewers have conflated the individual who plays a character and the character the actor is playing. Thus by analyzing issues of race, where the line between real and unreal is purposely blurred the impact of how race is constructed can be quite great.

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NOMENCLATURE

CMC	Computer-mediated communication
RTV	Reality television
RW/RR	<i>Real World/Road Rules</i>
TV	Television
TRW	<i>The Real World</i> (1992-)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“But I didn’t know Jewish guys wore ninja outfits when they pray. That’s the good thing about being on ‘Big Brother’, you know, I can learn different cultures, and, uh, how they work.”

Lance, *Big Brother* (2010) Season 12, Episode 9

Studying popular television is important not only because of the ubiquitous nature of television and its programming but also because it plays a critical role in the understanding of others. The proliferation of reality television (RTV) in the contemporary cultural landscape invites inquiry into a sociologically rich medium that challenges the traditional framework of entertainment television. RTV promotes itself in large part through the idea that it offers a better representation of how people “really are” than even the best-written dramedy that speaks to the pathos of the human condition. Specifically, the idea is both controversial and appealing that through the use of ‘non-actors’ and unscripted interactions, we can garner some ideas of the basic structure of human nature in our society. Though the basic premise of entertainment television is that these types of program are nothing more than a diversion, the fact remains that they are organized to attract audiences to either provide personal viewer satisfaction or to create financial profit for the producers and owners (Turow 1997). Realistically, there is most likely a synergistic relationship between feeding consumer satisfaction and maximizing a show's profit.

This dissertation follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

Defining RTV is not as easy as it seems since what exactly constitutes reality television is greatly contested. Hill argues “Reality TV is a catch-all category that includes a wide range of entertainment programmes [sic] about real people . . . reality TV is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (2005:2). Lea (2007) argues similarly,

First, reality TV transgresses the limitations of genre, that is, it is textually subversive in that it is a hybrid form, blending multiple television genres, such as documentaries and game shows. It can also be seen as transgressing the limitations of the television screen itself, in that it exceeds those boundaries and crosses into other media, such as the internet. Thus, it is intertextual and/or multiplatform; *Survivor* losers discuss their experience on morning talk shows; *Big Brother* can be watched on our television screens or we can watch the *Big Brother* house live via the internet twenty-four hours a day (47).

RTV as it is recognized today has its roots in shows such as *Candid Camera* and *Cops*. The emphasis is on viewing what ordinary people do when facing an unusual situation or having the audience observe what is taking place in sort of a documentary style setting.

The blurring of lines and genres was often present in television programming long before RTV flooded the airwaves. Mellencamp (1986) discusses the situation comedies *I Love Lucy* and *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show* which both featured marriages on the screen portrayed by real life married couples. The Nelson family is also among this group because Ozzie Nelson, his wife Harriet, and their sons starred as (versions of) themselves in the early, much-imitated, and longest-running family TV sitcom, *The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet* (Rich 1998: A25). The show blurred the lines between fiction and reality so much so that the Nelsons’ television home was a replica of their Hollywood home (Weinraub 1998). While this show is often

discussed as the ideal family, the real-life Ozzie and Harriet could not live up to their own image encountering many problems off screen. In 1998, A&E aired a two-hour documentary, *Ozzie and Harriet: The Adventures of America's Favorite Family*. The director argues that this documentary was “post-modern” because it allowed the family to work on some of their issues including a father who was a “dictatorial presence looming over the family”. He states, “[t]hey were struggling to be real themselves, through the un-reality of television. This is what they know. They were struggling to escape this candy-coated, white picket version of themselves because they knew it wasn't true” (cited in Weinbraub 1998: E4). In her work, Coontz demonstrates that many of these memories of a time depicted by shows such as these are myths and argues “that the 1950s were no more a ‘golden age’ of the family than any other period in history” (2000: 14). Further Coontz demonstrates a tension between real and unreal because Hollywood stars had to make their public images demonstrate a commitment to marriage and stability (2000:27) as a result of a new emphasis on family, such as a studio having Joan Crawford pose for pictures mopping floors (2000:28). The influence of *Ozzie and Harriet* is evident not only simply in its rendering of the “ideal” family but as a precursor to what we now know as RTV. The 1998 A&E Nelson family documentary presented us with a strange inversion of the fictional *Ozzie and Harriet*, but one which we were by that time familiar.

Much more akin to what we now call RTV, the program *An American Family* appeared in the 1970s as a documentary-style program where the audience was directed to be aware of the cameras but the idea was that there was a lack of intervention on the

part of the production crew. According to Ruoff, “this documentary chronicled seven months in the lives of the Loud family of Santa Barbara, California including the divorce proceedings of the parents and the New York lifestyle of their gay son, Lance” (2002: xi). Ruoff states that the producer “deliberately chose an upper-middle class white family whose lifestyle approximated that of life seen on shows such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*” (2002: xii). In what many called a real-life soap opera, millions of viewers also knowingly encountered their first gay person as son Lance was out, and is still often credited as being the first gay character on television. The program blurred conventions of different media forms as it used narrative techniques in a non-fictional account of family life,

Unlike most documentaries *An American Family* had no host, no interviews, and no voice-over narration. By bringing cameras into the home, *An American Family* announced the breakdown of fixed distinctions between public and private, reality and spectacle, serial narrative and nonfiction, documentary and fiction, film and television (Ibid).

In a more contemporary example and also picking up on this theme of RTV being both multi-platform and a fusion of multiple media forms, Jenkins argues, “*Survivor* is television for the internet age – designed to be discussed, dissected, debated, predicted, and critiqued” (2006a:25). Specifically, Jenkins draws attention to the interconnectedness between television and the use of the internet in a variety of ways. Jenkins introduces the idea of convergence culture “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect in unpredictable ways” (2006a:2). However, *An American Family* provides a case study of the age of convergence media long before *Survivor* as the Loud family went from ordinary family to celebrities and

gave interviews, wrote newspaper and magazine articles, and appeared on various talk shows thus highlighting an earlier form of the multi-modality we can see in today's media structures. Further, the show also sparked many heated debates about family life, sexuality, and the role of television in society. While the show was heralded by some, others were quick to criticize it as Ruoff points out. The innovations it left behind are apparent in other forms of programming: "the use of lightweight portable and wireless microphones, the recording of spontaneous action without scripts, the telling of a non-fiction narrative in episodic, serial-form – were later absorbed into commercial television in modified forms" (Ruoff 2002:xx).

MTV's *The Real World* (TRW) was, in 1992, the first to follow in the footsteps of this soap-opera style documentary which placed its emphasis on following everyday individuals, but by placing its participants in somewhat extraordinary situations, further explicitly became a convergent media product. According to Sasha Alpert, who oversees BMP documentaries (a division of Bunim/Murray Productions) the creators of TRW looked at the Loud Family when developing TRW. She states, "Reality is a more commercial version of what documentaries are" (cited in Keveny 2007). The show's participants, from its beginning, were/are selected primarily for their diversity from one another and the potential for drama that can ensue when these strangers volunteer to live together.

In contrast to its clear foundational place in the history of RTV, the type of reality show that most people are familiar with or associate with "reality television" is CBS's *Survivor*. Although it aired eight years after TRW first season, *Survivor* is often

credited with bringing RTV into peoples' homes – likely because it appears on a free broadcast rather than a paid cable network (Smith and Wood 2003: 2). However it should be noted that *Survivor* is just one type of reality television programming: competitive reality television. To present this as representative fails to capture the wide array of RTV programming. I argue that TRW is a precursor to the development of more sophisticated or “converged” commercialized genres, such as competitive RTV represented by shows such as *Survivor* where the reality represented is explicitly affected by the marketing machine that helps sell the show¹. One way in which RTV programming can increase fan participation is in utilizing various modalities to further the effects of the marketing machine. Further, I argue that the natural extension of the evolution of RTV from the aforementioned docudrama is TRW because its original iteration was lacking in this integrated marketing and instead was grounded more in the documentary style with more of a focus on the interaction of the participants than on the production's effect on the viewing audience (and vice versa). Oullette and Murray argue about RTV that “the cultural and political possibilities of convergence have taken shape within a broader climate of corporate synergy, consumer profiling, and integrated advertising” (2004:2) while maintaining that “[...] it wasn't until the premiere of *The Real World* on MTV [...] that we began to witness the emergence of many of the textual characteristics² that would come to define the genre's current form” (2004: 4).

¹ Ironically enough, it is still TRW which pioneers this type of programming too since MTV's *Road Rules* appeared on the network as a spin-off in 1995. Later a second spin-off appeared in 1997 where former *Road Rules* and *Real World* contestants are pitted against each other. These both aired before *Survivor*'s premiere in 2000. As well, Oullette and Murray (2004) outline the many predecessors to this genre including quiz shows that appeared long before even *Road Rules* or *Survivor*.

² These textual characteristics are discussed later in the introduction.

Supporting the idea that the emergence of *Survivor* follows a pre-existing evolutionary growth of the genre, Andrejevic argues: “In the wake of *Survivor*’s runaway success, reality TV was rapidly transformed from a cheap form of niche programming to the hot programming trend of the new millennium, and eventually into a genre of its own, spanning two new Emmy categories in the United States” (2004:1-2). Therefore, I offer that TRW serves as a more suitable point of emergence for the RTV genre prior to *Survivor*’s explicit efforts to use the competition framework to guise a molded storytelling that could both be formed by unexpected and drama-inducing game and rule changes, as well as directed casting of specific characters to yield maximum results for a now intentional marketing vehicle.

Ouellette and Murray contend that reality TV is “an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse for the real” (2004:2). The context in which RTV programs are constructed has nonetheless introduced a unique opportunity to examine key questions about the construction of certain identities, selves, characters, caricatures, and stereotypes. Furthermore, of utmost importance is not only the characterization of the RTV participants’ characterization, it is also important to understand the means by which this formation occurs.

In reality television, both the characterization and means of characterization represent a change in producer, viewer, and actor/participant interaction that speaks to the nature of media's evolving role from a formerly sender-receiver model of message and image formation to a more dynamic 'conversation' (sometimes literally) between all

stakeholders. As reality television has evolved alongside mass media as a whole, we have seen the emerging reliance on the interplay between reality television and social media³. Social media has introduced another sphere of media where there is a necessary interaction between the producers, viewers, and participants. Social media has played such a role in this evolution that in more than one season of TRW a participant was cast as a result of online voting. My analysis explicates a view of media that necessitates looking at the active audience member and fan which, as Jenkins writes, sees “media consumers as active, critically engaged, and creative” (2006b:1). Speaking specifically of RTV, Oullette and Murray maintain, “reality TV continues to serve as the principal testing ground for emerging convergence strategies such as podcasting, user-generated content, webisodes, and interactive games” (2004:2).

Reality television has explicitly established the most apparent paradigm of a media society in which the viewer or receiver is also an acknowledged and sought-after active participant in the formation of messages and frameworks. In RTV viewers can participate in several ways. In some programs, viewers vote on who remains on the program through various means such as telephone voting, voting via text message, or voting via the web e.g. *American Idol*, *Dancing with the Stars*, and *The Voice*. In other programs, viewers are encouraged to watch extended deleted scenes or follow-ups with participants by going to the program’s website though this type of participation is

³ The term is credited to Chris Shipley and used to describe when online tools are used to facilitate communication (Newsroom, Houghton, and Patten 2009:49). Though the term is often reduced to simply engaging in social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace, it encompasses a wide range of activities. Blackshaw defines consumer-generated media as including the ability to converse “across blogs, wikis, message boards, video-sharing sites, social networking pages, and more” (2008:3) all of which can fall under the guise of social media.

increasingly seen in fictional programming. In RTV these interactions can affect the narrative as in the case of *Big Brother* where viewers determine things like what the cast will eat for the week or as in the case of “America’s Player” where viewer votes determine what the participant must accomplish throughout the week without revealing his/her status as “America’s Player”. Perhaps most important is that the people we are watching on RTV projects necessitate a different type and level of investment than the strictly fictional (or even “based on real persons”) media character due to the fact that they are presented as just like us, drawn from couches like ours. Hill maintains about RTV programming that as audiences “watch reality TV they are not only watching programmes [sic] for entertainment, they are also engaged in critical viewing of the attitudes and behavior of ordinary people in the programmes, and the ideas and practices of the producers of the programmes” (2005:9). As such viewers are not only engaged for the purpose of entertainment but are critical consumers of the behavior of ordinary people just like us. The explosion of reality TV also points to changes taking place in the industrial context of labor unrest, changing technologies, and other financial considerations which can make reality television programming attractive to networks.

In 2007, the Writer’s Guild of America held a three month strike because writers wanted residuals on work which was downloaded via new-media devices or streamed online. In reaching a deal, one of the concessions was that reality television and animation would not become part of the union (Cieply, 2008; Cieply and Barnes 2008). More recently, ABC cancelled two of its long-running soap operas, *All My Children* and *One Life to Live* due to a declining audience and despite cost-cutting measures that had

been taken. The shows are being called “lifestyle programs”. One of the shows, *The Revolution*, replacing the dramas is from the producers of RTV programs, *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition* (Campbell 2011). The president of daytime at Disney ABC/Television, Brian Frons, said in a statement that audiences wanted shows with “real life takeaways” (Huff 2011). This move signals that the effects of RTV are far-reaching at least in terms of financial considerations. The emphasis of reality programming on audience interaction and commercial orientation makes the meanings and representations shown to viewers a significant aspect of this genre. These facts in conjunction with the pervasiveness of reality TV make an understanding of this medium sociologically important.

A particularly striking aspect of this genre is the emerging television culture that influences the mainstream population. One message in particular involves the representation of marginalized groups. As researchers have shown, non-Whites have very little influence in determining representation on American popular media (Wilson and Gutierrez 1995: 198). Yet it is in reality television programming that we have the most diversity in casting. Reality television programming allows individuals to be cast that might not otherwise get any exposure (Marikar 2009, McAbee 2009). This does raise the question however of whether it is enough to simply be exposed, or whether the often stereotypical portrayals of marginalized groups do more harm than good. To this end, I will focus my analysis on racial and ethnic minorities as depicted by MTV’s *The Real World*.

Since the focus of this work is on examining constructions of race, it becomes necessary to provide definitions of these concepts. As Omi and Winant argue, race in the United States is both “obvious and complex” because while everyone “knows” what race is, there are different opinions as to the number of racial groups there are, the name of those racial groups, and who should fall within those groups (1986:3). Race is a complex construct shaped by the societal contexts within which we find ourselves, and as such Omi and Winant use the term racial formation to refer to “the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings (61). Cox defined race as “any people who are distinguished, or consider themselves distinguished, in social relations with other peoples by their physical characteristics” (1948:402). Similarly, van den Berghe emphasized physical attributes in defining a racial group as a “human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics” (1967:9). Given these definitions, it is perhaps understandable that race is often understood in terms of some physical feature “such as skin color, hair texture, facial features, and musculature” (Burkhalter 1999:60). In defining ethnicity, there is also a distinction that groups are set apart from others though in this case due to some cultural difference which includes such characteristics such as language and religion (van den Berghe 1967). Of primary importance for my analysis is the role given to race within society, and as I will argue within TRW, in its deployment of how it both creates and reiterates these differences for various groups both racial and ethnic.

MTV's *The Real World* has been on the air for nearly two decades and was recently guaranteed seasons 27 and 28. In this television show we witnessed the emergence of many of the characteristics that have come to define reality television programming in its current form (Ouellette and Murray 2004: 3). In fact Ouellette and Murray state,

[B]y casting young adults in a manner intended to ignite conflict and dramatic narrative development, placing the cast in a house filled with cameras and microphones, and employing rapid editing techniques in an overall serial structure, the producers created a text that would prefigure programs such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. It could be argued that *The Real World* trained a generation of young viewers in the language of reality TV (2004: 3).

Further, Gray states, "The election of Bill Clinton, the end of *Cosby*'s reign, and the riots of Los Angeles together mark a significant shift in public discourses about race" (1995:11). These events also provide the backdrop against which TRW premiered. If the show trained a generation of young viewers in reality TV, it also trained a generation of viewers in race – its construction, its politics, and its interactions.

Kraszewski argues that although the title of the show implies that TRW is about simply presenting reality, the show in fact "actively constructs what reality and racism are for its audience through a variety of production practices" (2004: 179). Some of these practices include "the casting of roommates, the editing of the show, production decisions of what to film, and the organization of events into a serial narrative" (Kraszewski 2004: 181). In the particular arena of mediating race however, Kraszewski charges that TRW "mediates racism through discourses of ruralness and conservatism, masking the racism of liberals, propounding that racism is a matter of personal belief,

and failing to address the systemic nature of racism” (2004: 184). Kraszewski continues by pointing out that the show is unscripted and that there is no explicit order for the roommates to discuss race or racism. However in his analysis of the first twelve seasons of the program, Kraszewski states “throughout the seasons Bunim and Murray have consistently cast innocent, sheltered, and young white rural Americans in houses with two African Americans from urban areas” (2004: 184). This statement in and of itself calls for discursive analysis as the notion of innocence implicitly conjures up a juxtaposition of guilt, though it is unclear of what exactly it is the African Americans are guilty. The use of “innocence” in framing cast members is emblematic of how racism is manifested in white institutional spaces as Moore’s research reveals (2008) as will be discussed further in later chapters. Kraszewski continues that in many seasons, the show foregrounds the friendships between a white rural conservative and a black urban liberal insinuating that the problem of racism can be negated through changes in individual attitudes (2004: 188).

Taking this one step further, another question that must be addressed is why the race relations are overwhelmingly framed within the context of Black-White relations. Feagin maintains “white-on-black oppression is in several important respects the archetype of racial oppression in North America” (2001:3). In looking at the racial and ethnic minority cast members for the show, the largest concentration of representation is for Black men followed by Black women. Furthermore as the show evolved into including specific descriptors for other groups as is evidenced by its introduction of cast member who were either bi-racial or multi-racial most of these characters were also part-

Black. As I will argue below, framing race-ethnic relations in a very narrow manner is purposeful as casting for the show is a carefully crafted and directed process. Therefore any omissions reveal a great deal of what images of race are being constructed on the show – even through their exclusion.

Drawing on the work of several fields and positioning myself as a scholar-fan of reality television programming and TRW, this dissertation will show patterns in the construction of race by using an exemplar of this genre. In Chapter II I provide a literature review situating television in the larger landscape of popular culture and RTV within TV. I will show how reality television first complicates the traditional view of media as a one-way process. I will explore whether reality television has introduced a newer, more critical consumer of media. I will also discuss how television has influenced racial politics. In Chapter III I outline the methodology utilized in this dissertation and address ethical concerns of using computer-mediated communication (CMC) as the primary source of data. I focus on the evolution of cast members and conflicts regarding issues of race and ethnicity as framed on MTV's *The Real World*. I utilize internet-based information such as cast bios and episode summaries as well as viewings of the show to inform my results. Chapter IV introduces the results of this analysis and also explores how these findings fit within the larger literature. I then argue that reality television has introduced a more interactive process of media and will demonstrate how this process works by pointing towards some audience responses of the show. The current project seeks to continue the challenge regarding the idea of a passive audience by highlighting what many researchers have sought to do before me: view

audience members as active in their construction of meaning in interpreting popular cultural images. This view is grounded in the “new audience research” (e.g. Bobo 1995; Radway 1987; Ang 1985; and Morley 1980), and what the present project does is contribute to the emerging body of literature that focuses on reality television. To this I include some audience interpretations of the show, beyond my own critical viewing, including academic and non-academic. Lastly, in Chapter V included with my concluding remarks, I address possibilities to extend this argument outside of this one case study and into moving beyond my own critical reading of the show for future research.

In order to investigate the answers to these questions, it is necessary to first place reality television within the cultural spectrum. Television as a whole finds much disregard as a form of reputable or valuable culture – an attitude confounded further by the reality genre. Much of this disrepute results in the application of a system which does not adequately represent the social dynamic occurring around television culture. For through the depiction of race relations on a reality program we gain entry into understanding in how race and ethnicity is embedded in our culture, how mass media communicates understanding of race through its depiction, and how not only the key players in the depiction of the relationships but also the audience seeks to challenge the construction, depiction, and consumption of said race relations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Examining culture critically helps us learn a great deal about our society. As Durham and Kellner state, “Understanding culture critically also provides insight into the ways that media and culture construct gender and role models, and even identities, as the populace come to pattern their lives on the celebrities and stars of media culture” (2006: x). Specifically discussing television, Friedman argues, “television does not simply portray a window onto a real world ‘out there’, but frames the world, contextualizes the narrative, and argues for the integrity of the reality it depicts” (2002: 16). Television consumption as a cultural object is therefore best analyzed through a lens defined by context, interplay of understandings toward the development of messages, and ultimately the resulting understandings we accept. Fiske and Hartley state regarding television, “It is rather like the language we speak: taken for granted, but both complex and vital to an understanding of the way human beings have created their world. Indeed the resemblance of television discourse to spoken language explains our interest in the communicative role played by television in society” (2003:3-4).

The Real World is often associated with “low culture” as is all of reality television programming as a genre and nearly all of television programming itself. This conceptualization is rejected by the initiators of the form, because in the rawest type of reality television, we are viewing human nature at its very core and the genre borrows from documentary style programming which is something associated with “high

culture,” traditionally accessible by a few (e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Gans 1999; Sehmby 2002). In fact, it can be difficult for a viewer in some cases to even distinguish whether s/he is even viewing either a documentary or a reality show. Hence, the universality of viewing of reality television programming as merely low culture is complicated and contested. This distinction is important because as a result of classification we get a differing perception on the role of the viewer. Much of the research that focuses on audiences has operated on opposite ends of the spectrum. At one end, the focus is on the power of the text, the message, and medium while at the other focus is on the power of the audience to resist any messages passed through the media. If one considers popular culture nothing more than a mass-produced and mass-consumed medium, then it is worthy of study because of the various means of production and the owners of the means of those productions. If indeed it is a dominant class that is controlling the messages being sent to the masses, then why would we not seek to uncover the meanings of the messages? Conceiving of audiences as simply passive consumers of what is available to them removes any autonomy audiences may have. *The Real World* illustrates the tension of how neither of these perspectives adequately portrays what is actually occurring in today’s media environment. This show illustrates this complexity in a way that past theorists could not have begun to imagine due to the unique nature of reality television programming because this type of programming provides a moment in mass media where the producers, fans, and audiences can be one and the same.

Hunt states regarding popular television, “It served then, and continues to serve now, as a key cultural form in which we imagine the nation and negotiate our places in it

(2005: 22). Therefore it is critical to understand this medium before we can come to an understanding of the portrayal of race within it. Gray maintains, “commercial culture serves as both a *resource* and a *site* in which blackness [and thus race] as a cultural sign is produced, circulated, and enacted” (1995:2). By studying television, specifically reality television, and the portrayal and construction of race on television, we are gaining insight into the role of race as part of our society’s structure which the present work seeks to uncover by drawing upon the work of several academic disciplines. This is necessary as Durham and Kellner argue, “A critical media and cultural studies will overcome the boundaries of academic disciplines and will combine political economy, social theory and research, and cultural criticism in its project that aims at critique of domination and social transformation” (2006: xxvii). To understand the role of television in the realm of race and ethnicity we must first understand television’s role as a cultural agent.

Television as Cultural Agent and Important Site of Study

The difference between popular culture and mass culture is among the messiest of debates about culture. While both terms are used in opposition of high culture and generally refer to the cultural preferences of ordinary people, scholars believe there is a sharp divide between these two terms even though they are sometimes used interchangeably. High culture often refers to activities to which a more sophisticated audience is attracted often citing the opera or ballet as examples (Tatum 2001: 4). This distinction between mass culture and popular culture is a debate that questions the role of the audience as consumers. In this perspective, a dominant class controls the other

social classes including the culture industries such as television. These industries then shape the attitudes and behaviors of consumers (Tatum 2001: 5). In a broad sense, popular culture refers to those elements in our society which are mass-produced (Gans 1999: 29). Other theorists have classified popular culture as a form of what they called the dominant ideology.

Marx and Engels coined the term ideology in the 1840s to describe the dominant ideas in a given social order (Marx and Engels 2004). They state,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx and Engels 2004:64).

In this view then, anyone employed in the production industry as creators of cultural forms, such as television, are employed by the ruling class so that the narrative is a reflection of the world view imposed by those in power. The resulting narrative in any of the cultural forms, including television, is biased and distorted and designed to communicate the desired message of the ruling class. Any bias or prejudice particularly of a specific group is to encourage the audience to view that group in the same biased or prejudiced manner. Television, then in this conceptualization, serves as an important agent of socialization in society. These biased and prejudicial portrayals can only be uncovered by studying the cultural forms and cultural representations.

Gramsci (1971) builds on this idea of ideology in his view of hegemony.

Cultural hegemony is a direct response to his concern about how the public accepted the

rule of the dominant class. In this view the media is dominated by those sectors that also have the greatest economic and political power. But hegemony was not simply a result of economics or politics. Media and popular culture play a role in establishing hegemony. For Gramsci, the theory of hegemony includes not only an analysis of current forces of domination, but also the delineation of counterhegemonic forces, groups, and ideas that could contest and overthrow the existing hegemony (Gramsci, 1971).

The Institute for Social Research, what became known as the Frankfurt school, (among its most notable members Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse) builds on theories of hegemony and ideology. In this conceptualization of popular culture, mass culture then is “culture produced by culture industries such as television and advertising for ‘mass’ consumers in order to keep these consumers buying products and accepting ideas that keep a capitalist economy such as that of the United States strong and stable” (Tatum 2001: 4). Adorno and Horkheimer state,

It is quite correct that the power of the culture industry resides in its identification with a manufactured need, and not in simple contrast to it, even if this contrast were one of complete power and complete powerlessness. Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work (1972: 137).

In this rather pessimistic view the “victimized working classes were unable to defend themselves against propaganda and manipulation because of their lack of education and their experience of mindless and exhausting labor, from which mass culture, however unedifying, was a pleasant relief” (McQuail 1997: 13). An example of this type of mass culture would include formula dramas on U.S. television (O’Connor and Downing

1995:13) or any other type of repetitive formula. In this view, mass culture emerges on the basis of what will sell. If this is true, then mass culture is merely a “hollow, mindless product” (14).

In the view of the Frankfurt school, however, new cultural developments were seen as mere components of mass culture that were ushering in various ways of destroying meaningful culture. As such, media could be expected to work in a mechanical fashion. Later research focused on this assumption and questioned what if any effects media has on audience. Some research which emerged suggested that the mass media had no impact at all (O'Connor and Downing 1995:15). Unlike in the Frankfurt school's view, individuals are not passive and do not merely engage in complete acceptance of what is presented in the mass media. “Furthermore, if groups of people become substantially detached from the reigning cultural hegemony and begin not only to question the assumptions of their media . . . but to communicate with each other about such issues, then they are creating counterhegemonic processes and institutions” (O'Connor and Downing 1995:17). We are neither in this estimation on a level playing field nor are we victims of a mass culture imposed from above.

Still, the Frankfurt school researchers were the first to engage in critical studies of mass communication and culture and saw the importance of what they called “culture industries,” the process of the industrialization of mass-produced culture, as important agents of socialization (Durham and Kellner 2006: *xvi*). These researchers believed that media culture reproduced the existing society and manipulated mass audiences into obedience. A notable exception to the scholars associated with the Frankfurt school was

Walter Benjamin. Loosely affiliated with the school, Benjamin believed that mass culture could cultivate more critical individuals. In his essay, “The Artist as Producer”, Benjamin argued that “progressive cultural producers should ‘refunction’ the apparatus of cultural production” (Durham and Kellner 2006: 4) into a political forum. Benjamin states, “This betrayal consists, in the case of the writer, in conduct which turns him, from a supplier of the productive apparatus, into an engineer who sees it as his task to adapt the apparatus to the purposes of the proletarian revolution” (1982:268). His desire was to promote cultural and media politics that was concerned with the development of alternative oppositional culture. He saw the age of mechanical reproduction with new techniques which offered possibilities for political change. Film was particularly important to Benjamin because his focus was on the potential activist nature of film to promote specific ideas or progressive political ends (Benjamin 2006).

Horkheimer and Adorno respond to this optimism in their text *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where they argue that the system of cultural production served “to create subservience to the system of consumer capitalism (Durham and Kellner 2006: 5). For Adorno and Horkheimer mass culture refers to cultural expressions generated by big business to advance the bottom line (O’Connor and Downing 1995:12). Adorno and Horkheimer state,

Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. [. . .] Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors’ incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed (1972: 121).

This view is important because of the emphasis on the need to have interdisciplinary research as it combined the “the critique of political economy of the media, analysis of text, and audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture and communications’ (Durham and Kellner 2006: *xvii*) to create a critical and interdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural and communication studies.

At the heart of the issue is whether the distinction between high and popular culture is still relevant. As Adorno states,

The increasing strength of modern mass culture is further enhanced by changes in the structure of the audience. The old cultured elite does not exist anymore; the modern intelligentsia only partially corresponds to it. At the same time, huge strata of the population formerly unacquainted with art have become cultural ‘consumers’ (2002: 161).

Sociologists of culture frequently speak of a clear distinction between consumers of high culture and consumers of popular culture. Indeed this division is often directly attached to a system of inequality that reflects the hierarchical advantage of having access to high culture. The mere fact that only the elite have easy access to those forms of culture that are clearly distinguished as part of high culture makes this distinction one of class, not necessarily one of taste (Gans 1999: 8). Bourdieu on the other hand states,

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed (1984:6).

Thus reality television in this view is just one more way in which the powerful elite have control over those below. However, many theorists have argued that this distinction between high culture and popular culture is perhaps outdated and that a need to rethink

popular culture is long overdue (Mukerji and Schudson 1991: 1). Television provides solid and plentiful rationalization for this rethinking of such a bipolar distinction of cultural placement. As Fiske argues,

Any book about television culture is immediately faced with the problem of defining its object. What is television? And, equally problematically, what is culture? [...] I work with a definition of television as a bearer/provoker of meaning and pleasure, and of culture as the generation and circulation of this variety of meanings and pleasures within society. Television-as-culture is a crucial part of the social dynamics by which the social structure maintains itself in a constant process of production and reproduction: meanings, popular pleasures, and their circulation are therefore part and parcel of this social structure (1989:1).

The placement of television along an antiquated linear spectrum does not speak to the value of the medium as a cultural object. Instead, reassigning television as a culture of meaning and transference in defining the social structure itself removes the medium from a discourse that is at once too exclusive and lacking in applicability. Bourdieu states,

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences (1984:7).

Whereas Bourdieu argues the ultimate legitimization of social differences found in the distinction of higher and lower cultures (suggestive of more linear producer-receiver consumptive thought), he also notes that art and cultural consumption “fulfill a social function” in reaching this final state. It is this social function which has evolved from one of allowing the maintenance of class distinctions to one that serves as a medium for

the negotiation of cultural understandings in which class (or other) distinction of the audience is now only a part of the output. Television consumption serves as a prime example of this newly evolved cultural consumption in which the social function is no longer simply one of "legitimizing" social differences (along a linear cultural spectrum), but is now instead a social function that helps define, dissolve, and redefine these and other distinctions, such as perceptions of race and gender.

Critical approaches to society and culture and one that has had a far reaching influence is that put forth by the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies which Stuart Hall directed after succeeding Richard Hoggart (Durham and Kellner 2006: *xxiii*). This now classical period of British cultural studies adopted a Marxian approach to the study of culture influenced by theorists such as Althusser and Gramsci (Durham and Kellner 2006: *xxiv*). The researchers of this group became focused primarily on the effects of cultural forms, like television, on audiences and how audiences interpreted media culture in varied ways and contexts (Durham and Kellner 2006: *xvi*). These researchers rejected high/low culture distinct and viewed all cultural artifacts as important sites of study. In this view the audience is not seen as passive as in the Frankfurt school view but are active not only in the development of the meanings interpreted of the messages presented but also in the fact that it is the audience who determines what is popular. According to McQuail, researchers such as Hall and Gitlin, among others, envision and reinterpret the 'predominant tastes and preferences of the 'mass' audience in a positive way' (1997: 13). In this view, popular culture is not merely to be equated with 'low culture' but as different and something to be interpreted

according to local meanings. This school of thought still questions to what extent we can see the audience as active and resistant and criticizes audience research, such as the ‘uses and gratifications’ approach, that views the audience as fully in control of their media experience (McQuail 1997:14).

For Hall, popular culture is a site where “collective social understandings are created’, a terrain on which ‘the politics of signification’ are played out in attempts to win readers to particular ways of seeing the world” (Hall 1998, Storey 2003:4). Hall creates the encoding/decoding model that allows for understanding how cultural products can be viewed differently by different viewers. This view acknowledges that in understanding the media requires a certain view of power. In other words, the images and messages produced within the media are powerful and have power over its audience. It is important, Hall argues, to examine the social and cultural framework in which communication takes place. An important aspect of this view is that it removes the idea of producers as an evil entity creating with the sole intention of committing a large conspiracy against the audience. Rather, the producers themselves are drawing upon their own experiences in creating media.

The traditional model of mass communication research which conceptualizes communication in a circulation circuit has been criticized for its linearity: sender/message/receiver (Hall 2006: 163). Hall argues it would be more useful to think of the communication process “in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments” (Ibid). Hall refers to these moments as: production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction and envisions the

process as a “complex structure in dominance” (Ibid.). This process is sustained, according to Hall, through the articulation of practices that although are connected also maintain distinctiveness. While maintaining ties to Marx’s view of commodity production, Hall maintains this view “also highlights the specificity of the forms in which the product of the process ‘appears’ in each moment, and thus what distinguishes discursive ‘production’ from other types of production in our society and in modern media systems” (Ibid.).

Messages are initiated by production and are framed by meanings and ideas including the technical knowledge to create a program but also including assumptions about the audience. Hall states regarding production structures of television, “they draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, ‘definitions of the situation’ from the wider socio-cultural and political system of which they are only a differentiated part” (2005: 47). Circulation and receptions are moments of the production process and incorporated through feed-backs incorporated back into the production process itself. Hall maintains “consumption or caption of the television message is thus itself a ‘moment’ of the production process, though the latter is ‘predominant’ because it is the ‘point of departure for the realization’ of the message” (2006: 47). Production and reception are not identical but are “differentiated moments within the totality formed by the communicative process as a whole” (2006:48).

Text and Consumption or Meaning is Relational

As Hall maintains, it is necessary to focus on both production and reception as they are two distinctive moments in the communicative process. It is now that we turn our attention to previous research on the latter moment in the process. The issue debated in this large body of work is the extent to which one can with certainty interpret a given text and as to whether any given text will have a particular reading of that text. In her study of readers of romance novels, Radway maintains that critics long held the notion “that the text has intrinsic power to coerce all cooperative readers into discovering the core of meaning that is undeniably *there* in the book” (italics in original, 1983:54). Furthermore, critics assume, in Radway’s estimation, that their own reading is representative of all adequate readings of a text. In reader-theory and reader-response criticism Radway argues, “all acknowledge, to a greater or lesser degree, that the reader is responsible for what is made of the literary text” (Ibid.). She continues,

[D]espite their interest in the making of meaning, reader-theorists do not believe that literary texts exert no force at all on the meaning that is finally produced in a given reading. Rather, most argue that literary meaning is the result of a complex temporally evolving interaction between a fixed verbal structure and a socially situated reader. That reader makes sense of the verbal structure by referring to previously learned aesthetic and cultural codes” (1983:54-5).

One can deduce that while the reader has some power in the reading of a particular text, it is important to be aware of the text itself because of the power of the text. If the reader is referencing previously learned codes, it becomes even more important to study the source of those learned codes. In discussing TRW in particular, since I argue that TRW is the predecessor of RTV conventions it becomes important to not only study TRW for

its construction of race and race and ethnic relations, but also in its influence on the manner in which race as well as race and ethnic relations are received by audiences of contemporary reality television.

In previous research that does focus on television, one important study of note is that of David Morley. Morley (1980) applies Hall's model in *The 'Nationwide' Audience*. In this research, he identified different decoding by groups from different socio-cultural backgrounds. There were three different possible categories of decoding: the dominant reading, oppositional reading, or a 'negotiated' reading. Being aware of the manipulation and bias of the program did not necessarily dictate an oppositional reading of the program. In analyzing RTV fans, often cited is the fact that fans are fully aware of the manipulation of producers and are thus not concerned with the extent to which a program purports veracity, rather the focus is on whether the show is entertaining. Thus despite being aware of producer intervention and/or manipulation would not predict an oppositional reading of the information presented.

Later, John Fiske and Ien Ang were among the researchers who attempt to bridge the gap between critical social-behavioral and cultural approach to mass communication research. Fiske looks at Madonna and maintains she offers fans her own feminist ideology-critique, while Ang positions herself as a fan of *Dallas* in conducting research. Ang's work is a cross-cultural analysis of *Dallas* viewers wherein viewers or non-viewers of the show respond via letters to a classified advertisement with the following clause "I like watching the TV serial *Dallas* but often get odd reactions to it" (1997:268). Ang recognizes that theories of American television often make shows 'bad

objects' in what she identifies as the 'ideology of mass culture'. Further, these cultural forms, such as popular cultural products and practices, are labeled 'bad mass culture' (1997: 266) and discovers in her research that this conceptualization extends even to those she researches. Ang argues that ideology is important because it provides not only an image of oneself but "the ideology serves to outline the identity of other people" (1997: 268). For those individuals who dislike the show, their identity is in part wrapped up in distancing themselves from the show. Many of the individuals she researched also cited this ideology for their hatred of the show, *Dallas*. By defining the show as mass culture, any further reasoning for disliking the show become unnecessary.

Ang further articulates this ideology is not unknown to *Dallas* fans as she cites the following response,

It always hits me too that people react 'oddly' when you say you like watching *Dallas*. I think everyone I know watches it but some of my friends get very worked up over this serial and even go on about the dangerous effects on the average TV viewer. I really don't know what I should think of this (Letter 22) (1997: 269).

Other letter writers in Ang's estimation articulate the conceptualization of 'bad mass culture' by affirming the letter writer's affinity for the show in way that shows she is aware of the 'dangers' and 'tricks' of the show. In other words, it is permissible to view this program if you are fully aware of how "bad" it is for you to watch this show. A similar view is expressed in the following letter: "In fact it's a flight from reality. I myself am a realistic person and I know that reality is different. Sometimes too I really enjoy having a good old cry with them. And why not? In this way my other bottled-up emotions find an outlet" (Letter 5) (1997:269).

These fan and anti-fan realities are critical in our understanding of reality television programming. As a long-time fan of reality television programming myself, it is not uncommon to hear similar conceptualizations even over ten years after Ang's research was conducted. Reality television shows are often treated with disdain from many intellectuals as a part of popular/mass culture from which many attempt to maintain a distance. Sometimes this distance goes so far as to proudly claim with distinction, "I do not even own a television set." Or perhaps, "I do not watch any television." Ang sees among her respondents a negotiation that takes place between the accepted ideology of popular culture as mass, and therefore bad, culture among viewers as is evidenced by the letter writer above who allows herself to view the show because of her awareness there is a definite break from "reality". By definition, reality television programming problematizes this negotiation. There cannot easily be a separation between, "truth" and "reality" when the cameras are purported to pick up all that is "real".

The view of *Dallas* as bad culture extends even to those who are fans of the show and believe the show is not merely without substance. But Ang notes that despite attempting to view *Dallas* against the ideology of mass culture the letter writer "'negotiates' as it were within the discursive space created by the ideology of mass culture, she does not situate herself outside it and does not speak from an opposing ideological opposition" (1997:270). This is further highlighted in the following response: "You are right in saying that you often get strange reactions. Such as 'So you like watching cheap mass entertainment, eh?' Yes, I watch it and I'm not ashamed of it.

But I do try to defend my motivation tooth and nail (Letter 7) (1997: 270). Ang notes the ironic tone of defending something so vigorously of which one is not ashamed.

Ang highlights another defense mechanism by viewers of the show and also notes the ironic nature of the mechanism. At once, viewers can maintain an immense amount of intimate knowledge of the characters while claiming distance allowing intimacy and the passing of judgment on the characters. Intimacy alongside judgment can be difficult to reconcile however when in a social context. Ang states: “irony is here a defense mechanism with which this letter-writer tries to fulfill the social norms set by the ideology of mass culture, while secretly she ‘really’ likes *Dallas*” (1997:272). Ang argues that there is no one obvious ideological alternative which can be employed against the ideology of mass culture. Thus, several fragmented strategies are used by the respondents. Fans of the show cannot present a negative view of those who dislike *Dallas* unlike that utilized against them that the viewers of the show are ‘culture barbarians’ (1997:272). As such, fans and viewers of the show can only resist the negative identities that others project onto them.

The proliferation of audience reception studies that have emerged serve to demonstrate that audience members are not simply accepting of a blanket message communicated through popular culture. Specifically drawing on the genre of soap operas Ford argues,

Soaps do not exist in a vacuum, and a show's daily texts can only be understood in the context of the decades-long dynamic networks of fans surrounding them. Instead of imagining the audience as a passive sea of eyeballs measured through impressions, this approach views soaps as the gathering place for these social networks. Soap operas are dynamic social

texts that are created as much by the audiences that debate, critique, and interpret them as by the production team itself (2008:3.1).

Interestingly, TRW began because Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray intended to create a soap opera for MTV. When that endeavor proved to be too expensive, the decision to bring in non-actors was made (Bellafante 2009). Studying these texts as dynamic in nature requires not just understanding what is created by the producers but also understanding how the audiences then interpret these creations.

Speaking specifically of the role of race within texts, Hunt maintains that there is a relationship between media texts, discourse, representation, and ideology. If the relationship is imagined as a pyramid, where ideology forms the base, then representations like race occupy the next level of structure, followed by discourses, and finally media texts form the capstone (Hunt 2005:3). Gray argues that black youth use among other things language and music to construct themselves socially and culturally (1995: 149). He claims, “These, I believe, are the sites of some of the most complex and imaginative practices in black popular culture. These constructions of identity within and through commercial popular culture also represent significant and strategic interventions and cultural struggles in a world that is, for black youth, often hostile and suspicious” (1995:149). How the audience consumes those images is often a topic of debate but we must first understand what is being produced. While the images presented in media can be documented and as we can uncover patterns of portrayal this is only once side of the media model. We must get at uncovering how these images and ideas are consumed.

From “The Cosby Show” to “The Real World”

The Cosby Show debuted in 1984, amidst feelings that the civil rights era was responsible for many of the problems facing America at the time with the goal of producing a television show that “would work to ‘recode’ blackness” and to provide both “positive” and “uplifting” images of blackness (Hunt 2005: 13). The show remained at the top of the ratings during most of its eight year run. Its finale was scheduled to air in April of 1992, which coincided with the Los Angeles uprisings after the Rodney King verdict. It is against this backdrop that MTV’s *The Real World* debuted in 1992. Gray states: “The election of Bill Clinton, the end of *Cosby*’s reign, and the riots of Los Angeles together mark a significant shift in public discourses about race” (1995:11). This contextual framework is a key factor in understanding the role that TRW plays not only to a specific audience but in terms of how this new discourse about race is being framed. In discussing *The Real World*, Kraszewski argues that even though the title of the show implies that the program is simply presenting reality, the show “actively constructs what reality and racism are for its audience through a variety of production practices” (2004: 179). While I discuss herein another reality television show, there are similarities which can be drawn between TRW and *The Apprentice*.

Both serve examples of production manipulation for the cause of framing the shows' concepts, the storyline, and its characters. In framing the characters of a show, the primary difference between regular television shows and reality television programs is seen. For, in reality television, the framing of a role for a participant invades the conception of a person's actual identity; whereas in regular television programming, this

identity formation apart from an actor's role proves difficult enough. In their analysis of *The Cosby Show*, Jhally and Lewis (1992) claim: "Like white respondents, black viewers found it difficult to distinguish between Bill Cosby and Cliff Huxtable" (49). Later, they argue: "the boundary between Bill Cosby and Huxtable seems even more blurred for black audiences than for white audiences" (49). They cite a black male respondent who says: "He portrays a good father, yeah, and he portrays a good father not only on this program but it follows him off the set and on the set. . . He always has time for children. If they got a problem, he's always there" (49).

This nebulous boundary definition of both an individual's identity and their working role(s) as an actor is only further confounded when audience interaction supports a hybridization of the character and actor into one individual. Within reality television, the individual and character are one in the same; and, therefore, both the audience's and producer's roles as "cultural producers" (re: Shefrin) only serve to solidify the message of their desired perception of the reality show contestants' identities.

This is undoubtedly further problematized when audiences feel bonded or drawn to certain characters (whether positively or negatively). McQuail (1987: 73) notes that audience members' reasons for being attracted to certain television programs over others fall into four main categories,

- *information*: finding out about society and the world; seeking advice on practical matters; satisfying curiosity and interest; learning
- *personal identity*: finding reinforcement for personal values; finding models for behavior; identifying with values others; gaining insight into oneself

- *integration and social interaction*: gaining insight into circumstances of others; gaining a sense of belonging; finding a basis for conversation; helping to carry out social roles
- *entertainment*: being diverted from problems; relaxation; getting cultural and aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment; filling time; emotional release; sexual arousal

One of the biggest draws of reality television is the ability to feature ordinary individuals with which audience members can identify. Because of the ability of the audience member to identify with the participants, audience members are more highly invested in the television program as well as in the other categories discussed by McQuail.

In an interview with *Road Rules* participant Susie, it is just this investment then that catapults Susie from being merely a fan into an active participant in response to the question of what made her want to go on a RTV show,

I've always been a huge fan of reality TV shows, especially *The Real World* and *Road Rules*. And I have always been sort of obsessed with watching it and I met a guy named Tim who was on *Road Rules* and he was from Pittsburgh also. And I met him after he did it and I was, like, star-struck. And I wrote him his first fan letter and I thought if I could just get on, then I could be a part of all the fun and meet all these people. I thought I would be a fan crashing the party. Ah, I didn't think I would be a real cast member, I only thought of myself as fan so that's why I did it. I wanted to see how it all worked, and experience the adventure. Because, it always looked like they were having so much fun and even though there was a lot of fighting, especially on *Road Rules*. It just seemed like this giant adventure. It had just seemed bigger than life. I wanted to be a part of it (Curnutt 2009:256).

This statement once again demonstrating the reliance of RTV on its fans. This happens not only because it is from the fan base that future cast members are pulled from, but also because it is important to have participants that fans can identify with.

Identification with characters can be critically important in how viewer readings.

In her work examining readings of the film *The Color Purple* Bobo finds that Black women's responses "confront and challenge a prevalent method of media audience analysis which insists that viewers of mainstream works have no control or influences over a cultural product" (1997: 311). Bobo argues that specific members of a culture construct meaning from a mainstream text different from the meanings others would produce. In this work Bobo examines Black women's positive reaction to a film which she claims portrayed Black people so negatively. She cites a sense of identification with the film as the impetus to become engaged with the film (1997: 313).

Bobo argues that to simply classify Black women's reaction to the film as 'false consciousness' is far too easy. While Black women are aware "of the 'oppression' and 'harm' that come from a negative media history" the women are also aware that their specific experience as Black women has not been sufficiently dealt with in mainstream media (1997:313). Drawing on previous research by Hall and Fiske, Bobo maintains that there can be two aspects to cultural competency, "the store of understandings a marginalized viewer brings to interpreting a cultural product" (1997:313). One of the readings is positive where the viewer takes something useful from the viewing by negotiating a response or giving a subversive reading to the work. The other is a negative viewing where the work is rejected by the viewer. These readings are a result of prior mainstream media experience.

Reconceptualizing the Media Model by Situating RTV

Croteau and Hoynes argue that the media cannot be understood without understanding the media as part of the larger social world. Further they state "there is no 'top' or 'bottom' to the process; rather, it is a circular, multidimensional process (2003:25). In this conceptual schema, the media industry is defined as the entire organizational structure that makes up the media which includes all media personnel. It is this media industry that is the producer of the media message or product. Readers or audiences are influenced by the media messages they see. The audience "must actively interpret and construct meaning from those messages and products" (26). Technology affects the media industry and the media industry influences the direction and application of technology. Each of these components is affected by and affects the other key components.

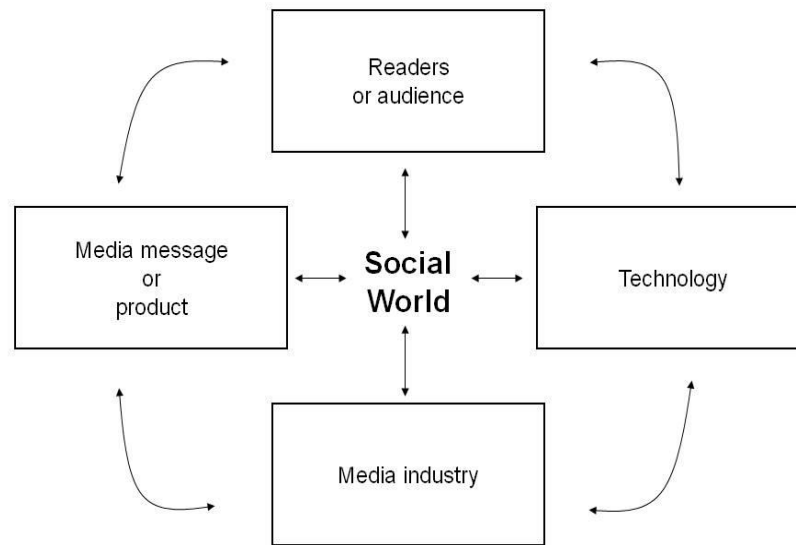


Figure 1 Simplified Model of Media in the Social World.
(as extracted from Croteau and Hoynes 2003:25)

While the model in Figure 1 above is useful in clarifying some of the relationships between the various components making up mass media, reality television serves to complicate this model. In the model put forth by Croteau and Hoynes, there is an assumption that there are clear boundaries between that which comprises the media industry and that which does not. However, reality television's reliance on ordinary individuals *as* actor-participants, and thus as part of the industry, collapses these boundaries. As part of the media industry, individuals turned participants can help

convey or contest the desired message of the producer. Further, in this model Croteau and Hoynes argue that it is the media industry that can influence the direction and application of technology. Yet, many reality television participants and audience members have actively used new forms of technology in order to contest and affect the original messages put forth by producers. For example, Shefrin (2004) citing Jenkins's (1992) identification of levels of activity of participatory fandom notes "the use of the Internet as a 'base for consumer activism' such as speaking back to producers and media companies, or lobbying for alternative developments" (269).

This participatory element found in such activities as Internet blogging and website creation, as well as in follow-up television and other media appearances, is what reconstructs the model offered by Croteau and Hoynes when examining reality television. While regular television show actors have also begun to take part in this participation via technological and other media forums, the nebulous role of the reality show character as both an ordinary individual and a reality show participant is what creates the most evolved model of television consumption in the present day.

Fiske (1992) states: "Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry" (24). He further argues: "popular culture is not consumption, it is culture – the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasure within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities" (23). As reality television and the use of participatory technology have blurred the boundaries between industry and consumer, in this genre, television *consumption* cannot be seen as a simple exchange process.

Instead, reality television has introduced the most overt example of Fiske's portrayal of popular culture as an "active process [...] within a social system".

While examples are abundant within the reality television genre, it is the onset of *Survivor* – with the element of competition – that is responsible for the most recognized form of reality television. Shows in which participants vie for position as the winner or best over others have created an explicit effort by producers, participants, and audience members to rally for their interpretation of specific messages which is one outcome of having a perspective of a dynamic field of mass media. As Stuart Hall states: "In the study of popular culture, we should always start here: with the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it" (1998:443). One example of how these television shows can exemplify containment lies in the following critique of *Joe Millionaire*: "Many believe that the producers of *Joe Millionaire*, a popular reality-based television show from the FOX network, present a homogenized version of courtship through the use of editing" (Graham-Bertolini 2004:341). Further, the author maintains: "by presenting a version of reality distorted by editing, *Joe Millionaire* perpetuates problematic stereotypical images of appropriate female demeanors and goals" (341). On the other hand, reality television representations can serve as a form of resistance when providing representation of groups that might not otherwise be portrayed or by providing positive portrayals of minorities. This can be evidenced in the following in regards to *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and how it "is qualitatively distinct from the related kinds of representation of gay men that have preceded it, enabling this reality series to work representational

'magic' by consistently communicating, in implicit ways, that gay men are superior – rather than inferior – to heterosexuals" (Hart 2004:242).

Thus, as I will demonstrate, the stake has become not only the prize pool or reward explicitly stated in the shows' concepts, but also the resulting desire of all parties to win favor for their desired interpretations. Often, struggles resulting from this type of infused competition have created greater 'prizes' sought after by participants, producers, and audience members. These causes include: increased notoriety, invitations to other shows, and thus increased airtime for participants; unexpected *buzz* for a show and its creators; or, uprisings of cult (or popular) fandom around a show's intrigue.

Reality Television: A Polemic Construction of Traditional Television Consumption

As a genre, reality television is distinguished from traditional television. Smith and Wood maintain,

Here, a key distinction must be made between traditional commercial television that enables viewers to imagine separate realities between the consumer appeal of advertisements, dramatic narration of the stories between the ads, and interpretation of those stories for individual purposes. Reality television continues to demand our attention because its stories replace our 'real ones,' become more important, more immediate, more 'real' than our lived experience (2003:3).

Given that the distinctions and critiques of popular culture often incorporate a discussion of what is real and what is entertainment (see for example Gans 1999: 82), reality television serves to further complicate the study of popular culture. The generally accepted conceptualization of television and its images as part of popular culture serve to guide the type of research that is conducted on television and television programs.

Where television programs, specifically reality TV programs, fall in the cultural context

impacts the type of studies which are conducted on this genre. Bryant and Miron state, “From the perspectives of producers, the primary purpose of the preponderance of today’s electronic media messages is entertainment” (2002: 549). Simply placing television, and by extension reality television, into the category of entertainment makes it easier for some social scientists to ignore the potential impact of this genre on our society. Instead, examining reality television as a cultural agent aids in eliminating the constraints imposed by the previously mentioned traditional approach; and consequently provides us a current and relevant field in which these dynamics can be deconstructed. Furthermore, understanding reality television as more than simply something that can be dismissed requires a deeper understanding in the evolution of the varying forms of reality television.

Reality television as a genre “involves placing ‘ordinary’ people before the camera and deriving some entertainment value from the perception of their activities being unscripted” (Smith and Wood 2003: 2). Still relatively little work exists that examine this type of programming. Friedman credits this lack of scholarship not “to a lack of interest in the subject but rather to an inherent difficulty in describing and containing the ideological, economic, cultural, technological, and political influences that impact televisual representations of real events” (2002: 1). Friedman adds that “no single methodology or theory can adequately contain the varied forms and fluctuating nature of television’s relationship with reality” (2002: 1). Therefore, by necessitation the current study draws upon the work of several authors across several disciplines to inform and guide the theoretical arguments presented here.

Many claim that the current permeation of reality television is proof of a somewhat weakened intellectual economy. McCarthy (2004: 20) states: “Reality TV today is a cheap endlessly recyclable and licensable programming format, a product of the collapse of the three-network system and the rise of cable television and new networks like Fox.” Yet when the term reality television is mentioned, few people actually think of the early wave of what is considered reality television.

One of the first glimpses of reality television begins with Allen Funt. Although he is known as the creator of the hidden-camera program *Candid Camera*, he was also the producer of *Children of the U.N.* As part of the Ford Foundation’s arts and culture variety program *Omnibus* the film offers viewers interviews and observational footage of children in an international school in New York. Here, reality television is clearly not considered the same type of reality television in the same form that is recognized in present day. Here too these types of reality television programs were “championed by the prestigious Ford Foundation, highbrow TV critics, and behaviorist researchers, who all saw the representation of ‘real life’ in Funt’s work as both a respectable genre and a boon to liberal democracy” (McCarthy 2004: 10). Furthermore, the early formats of reality television as documentary complicate the placement of reality television in the cultural context. *An American Family* also brought this distinction to a head. Murray writes,

Such confusion over how to place the series led anthropologist Margaret Mead to remark to TV Guide, ‘I do not think that American Family should be called a documentary. I think we need a new name for it, a name that would contrast it not only with fiction, but with what we have been exposed to up until now on TV’ (2004: 41).

In the most current forms of reality television, the packaging of the program becomes increasingly important. *American High*, for example, was sold as a reality program on Fox and a year later appeared on PBS as a documentary series (45). Murray asserts: “Documentaries are thus *believed* to play a central cultural role in representing minority viewpoints and having serious historical social significance” (2004: 43). Yet the same types of issues that are dealt with on documentaries are also embraced by other reality television programs such as MTV’s TRW. It is this attempt at finite distinction that confounds the traditional model of a linear cultural spectrum. As previously mentioned, the traditional model is further challenged when the direction of message delivery (and consequently message formation) is no longer evident as purely singular when regarding reality television. Reality television offers a firm example of examining the impact of cultural consumption through the more appropriate lens of dynamic social context in which the messages transmitted are not simply sent top-down, but now exist as a result of an ongoing and active interaction between producers, actors, and consumers.

Survivor's producer, Mark Burnett, is responsible for creating another highly recognized program, also of a competitive nature, *The Apprentice*. The first season of its run introduced the world to Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth. It is here that we return to Hall's notion that within popular culture there is always the contested terrain of we can view this situation is through the producers' manipulation of final content presentation using editing techniques in order to reach a desired portrayal of a particular individual.

Omarosa and the Making of a Stereotype

Omarosa presents an interesting case study in examining this reformed interaction of reality show participants turned audience members and their (collective) effect on the formation of media messages. In Omarosa's case, this is only the beginning of a cycle in which her role as participant and audience member revolves into the formation of pseudo-celebrity status⁴. Within this role formation, Omarosa is representative of a body of reality 'stars' in similar self-mandated cycles who seek to earn the longevity needed to continuously sell their chosen messages – some of self-identity and desired characterization. Omarosa offers a keen example of this hybrid audience-participant role that, through the ongoing interaction with the media structure, aims to mold a specific message of self-identification. What the specific identity is remains somewhat of a tenuous product.

When Omarosa signed up for *The Apprentice* and was eventually selected for the premiere season of this reality series, each contestant was featured on the show's website with a quote assisting in the first shaping of their identity on the show. Included with Omarosa's brief biography is the following quotation: “I’m going to crush my competition and I’m going to enjoy doing it” (www.nbc.com/apprentice). Succinctly, it plays into the competitive element of the show and that desired by the producers in forming the contestants' competitive nature as ideal participants on the show.

⁴ Omarosa, however, was deemed enough of a celebrity to get cast in *The Apprentice* Season 7 which appeared in 2008, also known as *Celebrity Apprentice*. This was also the first celebrity-filled season of the show.

As Shefrin notes, "[t]o some extent, the dominating effects of outside forces on a particular artistic field will depend upon the strategies employed and the alliances chosen by the cultural producers who are positioned within the field" (2004:263). In this case, the simple inclusion of a quotation is an example of a strategy employed by the show's producers, one of the active "cultural producers", to create a specific desired result, or "dominating effect". Specifically, the formation of Omarosa's identity as ruthless and competitive is at the very least, a subversive message sent to establish a certain rapport with the character of Omarosa on the show. A dangerous flaw of this system is that the character on the show is also a former (and eventually, future) audience member whose identity is not separated by the attachment of a fictional character name. Indeed, even the concept of the show itself, while hyperbolic, is meant to blur the lines of what is real and what is fictional. *The Apprentice* is described as a "16 week job interview" with the ultimate prize being a corporate apprenticeship with real estate mogul Donald Trump.

Kinnick and Parton (2005) argue "*The Apprentice*'s rise as a cultural phenomenon may be due to its unique premise, which resonates with the ideals of American capitalism as well as many Americans' personal struggles to succeed in a competitive, sometimes cutthroat workplace" (430). Omarosa represents a reality show participant's portrayal of the promotion of capitalism in her flagrant attempts to remain in the media spotlight. In her case, what is being capitalized on is her "15 minutes of fame". What is intriguing about her self-promotion is not that she is herself interesting,

but instead that she continually aims to shape her identity by extending her stay in the limelight.

Her current website also provides the following information: "Omarosa has appeared on every major talk show including the Oprah Winfrey show, the Dr. Phil show, The Today show, and The Tonight show, Hard Ball with Chris Matthews, Larry King Live, Dateline and the View [sic]." Omarosa has also appeared on other reality television programs such as *Fear Factor*, *The Surreal Life*, and *Battle of the Network Reality Stars*. However her website reminds us she is the "only former Apprentice EVER contestant to be invited back [sic]". She was cast in *Celebrity Apprentice*. Finally her website also informs us that she was named the greatest RTV villain of all time by TV Guide (www.omarosa.com).

According to Omarosa's website in 2005, "She was selected out of nearly quarter of a million applicants as a contestant vying to head one of Donald Trumps [sic] million dollar companies". The website continues: "Omarosa quickly emerged as one of the breakout characters and was attributed with helping make it the #1 show on NBC. She was featured on the cover of the TV Guide just four weeks after her debut on the *Apprentice* [sic]". However, after appearing on *The Apprentice*, Omarosa stated,

People loved to hate me because I was set up to be the villain on the show, she says. "What the public doesn't realize is how much the producers of these shows make sure to assemble an unlikely group of individuals for the sheer purpose of conflict. This is particularly damaging for our people, when it's combined with the power of the media to perpetuate and reinforce preexisting stereotypes (cited in Edwards 2004).

In a videotaped excerpt from *The Dr. Phil Show*, Omarosa states, "I knew that if I was naughty, I could certainly dominate most of the show, and I did" (date of appearance May 4, 2004). Yet, at the beginning of the show she is quoted as stating: "*The Apprentice* stereotypes black contestants." These comments illustrate two competing thoughts and two sources for information about Omarosa, the former coming from Omarosa herself and the latter coming from the producers of the show. This demonstrates the dynamic model of television as a cultural agent in that different sources offer insight into the message of an individual's identity. With reality television, the discourse leading to the formation of the message continues far beyond the close of the series. Omarosa continues these two competing thoughts and sources of information far beyond her appearance on the show in which she was introduced.

This discourse has many players. The nature of reality television also assumes that these players do not necessarily maintain the roles first established by the media industry. On *The Apprentice*, Donald Trump acted as himself within the fabricated "interview" scenario of the show's concept. However, after the show, much like Omarosa, his judgments and opinions added to the evolving formation of characterizations, understandings, and other messages introduced during the series. When questioned by Dr. Phil on the *The Dr. Phil Show*, Donald Trump stated about Omarosa,

As far as Omarosa is concerned, look, I like Omarosa very much but she was really a total disaster on the show. She really was. I mean, she-she cost Kwame a possible win. You know, Kwame was going for the big win, and he made the mistake of choosing Omarosa. Omarosa lied, she got caught lying a number of times. And, you know, some people would say she was a liar. But she certainly got caught lying a number of times.

So, most people would say Omarosa was a total disaster. I liked her (Date of appearance May 4, 2005).

The discussion continues with Dr. Phil asking Trump about Omarosa's comments about the portrayal of black women on the show by stating "Well, you – well, you – you say now that – some of her latest comments about the portrayal of black women on the show, that she's essentially calling you and Mark Burnett and "The Apprentice" racist?" This statement demonstrates the manipulation of the portrayal of Omarosa "as is" with an assumption that there is no manipulation on the part of the producers to purposefully create a stereotype, thus subversively proposing that any characterization of Omarosa along stereotypical lines was self-fabricated. In response to Dr. Phil's question about the racist nature of *The Apprentice* Trump replies,

Well, I don't know if she is or not, but, I mean, she's called other people other things. And, as you know, she said that somebody on the show used the N word, and when that was virtually proven that that never happened. The other person that was accused of it was absolutely livid. I've never seen anything like it. She was devastated by it. And, all of a sudden, you notice Omarosa backing away from it, backing away. So she says a lot of things that, unfortunately, aren't so (Ibid.).

From this, the following exchange demonstrates the interaction of two "cultural producers" acting as agents of the media industry providing possible explanations for why the contention over Omarosa's depiction is merely from a participant who is seeking other payoffs.

Dr. Phil: If -- with these people that are plucked from obscurity and then all of a sudden, they've been in front of a hundred million viewers across time, is there a problem with them turning into divas and starting to think that they're like the next big thing?

Trump: Well, they become big stars, whether it's Omarosa or any one of the others. We had about 18,000 people standing there at 5:00 in

the morning for two or three spots from this local area. So, you know, it's very, very tough to get on the show. But if you do get on the show, it's a little bit like hitting the jackpot (Ibid.).

Thus, the exchange offers audience members a plausible explanation and a logical cue with which to be able to dismiss Omarosa's accusations of racism on *The Apprentice*. Simultaneously the exchange also reinforces the idea that appearing is a good thing, at least in as much we associate hitting the jackpot as a good thing.

Omarosa has extended her presence far beyond *The Apprentice*. In 2010, she appeared in her own RTV program, *Ultimate Merger*. Still, with each media appearance there is a contestation over her portrayal. According to Martin, Omarosa and Wendy Williams had an exchange over William's objections to Omarosa's reinforcement of the "angry Black woman" stereotype. Omarosa is cited as responding, "I would rather be an angry Black woman than a buffoon" (2010). Despite Omarosa's own comments in 2004, when she argued that African-Americans had been portrayed negatively on RTV, she herself offers up a potential avenue by which audiences can erase any feelings that race might be a significant issue. She is cited as stating, "You've got to start looking and saying, 'Is that really how all African-Americans are?' Because they are trying to say that this is representative of our people" (cited in Martin 2010). Regardless of her intent, she herself questioning whether if these portrayals (on RTV of African Americans) is representative of who African Americans "really are", also allows audience members to themselves attribute *any* representations as simply "just how it is". This storyline of "just how it is" is an example of a central frame of what Bonilla-Silva refers to as color-blind racism.

Bonilla-Silva contends that there is a new racism that has developed since the late 1960s. This new racial structure comprises along with other elements: covert racial discourse and practice, avoidance of racial terminology along with claims of “reverse racism”, and rearticulation of some racial practices found in the Jim Crow period of race relations (2001:90). In other words, “whereas the racial practices typical of the Jim Crow era were overt and clearly racial, today they tend to be covert, institutional, and apparently nonracial” (2001:138). In this new color-blind racism, Bonilla-Silva refers to four central frames that both individualize and minimize effects of systematic racism or discrimination. These frames are abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (2006:51). Simultaneously these frame allow for the maintenance of the current system since the system is in effect, working. In her work on law schools as a white space, Moore argues,

Color-blind racism operates as an ideological framework that allows whites to espouse views that normalize systemic racism, minimize the relevance of racism, and denigrate the cultures of communities of color, while at the same time denying that they, themselves, are racist or responsible for racism” (2008:114).

While in his work, Bonilla-Silva finds that Blacks “for the most part” do not subscribe to the frames of color-blindness, he also shows that these frames and ideas have had a significant indirect effect on Blacks (2006:228). About one of these frames, the cultural rationale, Bonilla-Silva says, “although one would expect blacks to have a strong tendency against the ‘culture of poverty’ concept, I found that too many buy into substantial parts of this argument” (229). In the case of Omarosa, simply asking whether the portrayals of African Americans on RTV is representative of all people allows for a

justification that “this is just the way things are” (naturalization frame) because “they” are just different (cultural frame).

In Moore’s work on law schools, she describes an experience in which a professor she is interviewing asks, “So what difference does it make if you interview a black student, and he says that he is discriminated against, as they so often do, when there is no objective reality to support his claims?” (2008:119). As both she and Bonilla-Silva illustrate, it is these types of sentiments that allows for the dismissal of any possible racism that could occur, since the “objective reality” is not there to support claims of discrimination. Further, this also puts the responsibility on the part of the minority, in this case a black student, to demonstrate that they in fact have been discriminated rather than approach the situation with the assumption that in fact he had been discriminated against. Lastly, this type of statement allows for a dismissal of the entire issue regardless of whether discrimination has occurred because after all “they” so often do. Even if in this instance discrimination is to be found, it can easily be dismissed as an entirely isolated incident since the implication is that less discrimination occurs than is claimed.

In the quotations above (page 50), we learn that Omarosa’s accusation of racism through a contestant’s use of the “n-word” was “virtually” never proven. Though to be clear, Donald Trump takes as evidence that since the cameras were to capture every interaction, and since the cameras did not pick up on the interaction in question, he takes this to mean this event did not occur. However, he does not use absolutely was never proven, he himself uses the word “virtually”. Later, though, he says Omarosa, because

she backed away from statements, says “a lot of things that are not true”. This interaction points out that once again the responsibility is on the part of the aggrieved party to demonstrate in fact a grievance has occurred rather than on the accused to demonstrate that she has not committed the act. As Moore demonstrates, our legal model shows that there must be a demonstrated intent to discriminate that assumes racist individuals act with malice (2008:113). To take this one step further, this legal frame then provides individuals with a way to disavow racism while still engaging in practices like telling racist jokes or using racist language, since there was no racist intent. The presumed innocence on the part of the alleged racist reveals the white privilege that both Moore and Bonilla-Silva argue underlies today’s society.

Omi and Winant argue, “The continuing persistence of racial ideology suggests that these racial myths and stereotypes cannot be exposed as such in the popular imagination. They are, we think, too essential, too integral, to the maintenance of the US social order (1986:63). While the particular meaning, stereotypes, and myths can change, it is the presence of a racial ideology that they believe will be a permanent feature of U.S. culture. Speaking specifically of television, Omi and Winant argue that it has “been notorious in disseminating images of racial minorities which establish for audiences what people from these groups look like, how they behave, and ‘who they are’”. They continue, “The power of the media lies not only in their ability to reflect the dominant racial ideology, but in their capacity to shape that ideology in the first place” (Ibid.).

Examples of this type of manipulation are found in several RTV programs. However, RTV participants can also infuse their own contestations of what is realistic portrayal and what is merely the work of editing. While this process can be demonstrated using a wide variety of reality participants and programs, herein I undertake the task by providing a case study of MTV's – and RTV's - longest-running series, *The Real World*. In looking at the lives of the cast members, there are several examples of where the audience member who becomes participant then becomes producer wherein they become creators of media themselves through blogs, books, or as employees within the media industry. Fans of RTV can be keen observers of when there is overlap between this and other programming. Fans then are of particular importance to RTV not only because the program needs fans to generate ratings to keep a given show on the air but also because they can also follow the individual cast members themselves as they move on to other projects. Since my first experience with the show was as a fan, I now turn to explain what I mean by fandom.

Not “That” Kind of Fan or Confessions of a “Lurker”

Having identified as a fan however, requires some explanation as to what a fan encompasses especially since “fandom” is a term contested and debated whether within the world of academia or not. As Hills states, the issue of fandom is an issue of identity. He argues, “Claiming the status of a ‘fan’ may, in certain contexts, provide a cultural space for types of knowledge and attachment. In specific institutional contexts such as academic, ‘fan’ status may be devalued and taken as a sign of ‘inappropriate’ learning and uncritical engagement with media” (2002: *xi - xii*). Further, having identified as a

fan necessitates that I situate my own research in reference to the large body of recent literature on the study of fans and fandom (see for example Fiske, Jenkins) as well as the study of fan academics and scholar fans (see for example Hills). Bacon-Smith highlights, “Most fans take their first steps along the road to fandom before they have ever heard of the word or the community it represents” (1992:7). This was most certainly the case for me. Watching *The Real World* was just something that I did for fun – in part to simply pass the time and in part because I felt relieved that there was something on the air “for me”. As a passive – but budding active – consumer of my grandmother’s “stories” or soap operas, I had long witnessed the stunt casting of younger characters geared at attracting the teen audience that was out of school for the summer. Once we were back in school, however, the characters were often neglected or indeed written out of the show. Here, in TRW, was a show that was all about “young people”.

Once I started on the active consumer path, and then entered the path towards sociology, I acquired more vocabulary that allowed me to view many of my own experiences – including that of my own media consumption – in a very different light. Even then, my own television fandom was something that was relegated to being discussed with only those who really “knew” me. Upon discovering the ideas of Jenkins, it seemed my whole world would never be the same. Jenkins proposed the idea of the “aca-fan” wherein one could be both an academic and a fan, and that individuals could be a hybrid of both of these (1992). For in order to truly understand the cultural form at hand one had to have first-hand knowledge in order to contextualize not only the information presented but also the information received. It only mattered if critics were

panning a particular television show or even a particular genre if the critics had first-hand knowledge of the television show or genre. Without this knowledge the critic would simply be dismissed as “someone who did not get it”.

Proceeding further and further into my academic career, I found myself having experiences similarly described by Phillips (2010) in his blog on scholar-fandom and similarly echoed in Hills (2002). The issue here is the extent to which two spheres of identity can truly overlap. In the academic world, displaying a knowledge of too much information on, and too much familiarity with, the popular cultural subject matter at hand, particularly when undertaking the task of studying an artifact of popular culture, there is a fear that one will not be perceived not “scholarly” enough. On the other hand, in studying fans and audiences, especially those where a particular community has emerged, one must demonstrate a certain knowledge base in order to be accepted into the community. This raises certain issues of whether one can ever truly be objective in any research undertaking and if one can truly be a researcher when undertaking the study of the object of affection for the researcher?

This debate is far from over and the controversy of these roles is still discussed as evidenced by recent blogs by Ian Bogost and Jason Mittell. In a post where he expresses his dislike for the program *Mad Men*, Mittell argues that media scholars can “frame our critical accounts within academic models of how texts function as sites of interaction between creators, viewers, cultural contexts and taste cultures” (2010). Further he argues,

While media scholars do not solely write about what we like, the prevalence of books focused on “quality television” shows that appeal to

academics like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Sopranos*, and now *Mad Men* – especially when compared to the lack of similar volumes or essays about more lowbrow or mainstream programs – suggests that taste is often more of a motivating factor for our scholarship than we admit. We should own up to our own fannish (or anti-fannish) tendencies regarding our objects of study, not regarding fan practices as something wholly separate from our academic endeavors by acknowledging how taste structures what we choose to write about (justvwordpress.com 2010).

Here Mittell is arguing that tastes, what we like or do not like, guide the foci of our research referring to media scholars. In doing so, also conjures up the dichotomy of highbrow or lowbrow culture referenced earlier in this project. Bogost takes this argument one step further,

I'd push it further: the media scholar ought to resist aca-fandom, even as he or she embraces it. The fact that something feels pleasurable or enjoyable or good (or bad) need not be rejected, of course, but it ought to issue an itch, a discomfort. As media scholars, we ought to have self-doubt about the quality and benefit of the work we study. We ought to perform that hesitance often and in public, in order to weave a more complex web around media—not just to praise or blame particular works (www.bogost.com 2010).

A discomfort Bogost writes about is indeed a discomfort I have about my own particular location as both a researcher and fan of media but not completely for the reasons that Bogost lays out.

In undertaking the study of media I am well aware of the fact that I too produce information that is made public whether in the form of a simple facebook status, blog, or research project. It too becomes text that is left open to the interpretation of audiences who are active in their own interpretations and understandings of said text. In taking on the study of reality television, there is a tendency to get defensive about the object of study as reality television has developed a reputation to be exploitative and highlighting

the worst aspects of our society not only in terms of what we are viewing but also in terms of for who the show is being produced. As Mittell states, “Tastes may be culturally determined and reflective of underlying social structures, but they feel personal and authentically part of our identities. What we like shapes who we are, and criticizing something we love feels like an insult” (justvwordpress.com 2010). Many, both in the academic and nonacademic world, are quick to dismiss the genre as having no value whatsoever or in fact go so far as to blame the genre for the de-evolution of society. Many of the sentiments conveyed in Ang’s study on *Dallas* viewers I have experienced myself including the unwillingness at times to even share that you are in fact a fan of the program. After all, as Fiske writes: “Fandom is typically associated with cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates – pop music, romance novels, comics, Hollywood mass-appeal stars (1992:30). However, this issue I do not believe is relegated only to aca-fans, for we are all fans of something (Lewis 1992:1). The only difference between aca-fans, fan-scholars, or scholar-fans and other producers of text is that we position ourselves in the terrain of the world within which we write which can often be dismissed by others as nothing more than a frivolous attempt at justifying our hobby.

In Gatson and Zweerink (2004), Sarah N. Gatson describes her weekly ritual of watching and taping *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, then taking to the computer to discover the world of The Bronze and world of online discussion and online community. Mittell (2004) describes a ritual wherein he would watch the TV show *Northern Exposure* with friends. Jenkins (1988) and Bacon-Smith (1992) write about science fiction fans that

attend conventions and write fan fiction. In all of these and even other accounts of fan studies, the fan is portrayed as a very active member in the communities of the worlds the fans inhabit. Hills, though, distinguishes between a fan and a cult fan (2000) wherein a fan may simply discuss a show but a cult fan will seek out engagement that goes beyond simply “discussing” the show and this can be in the form of seeking out like-minded individuals, starting websites dedicated to their favorite character on their favorite television show, or even engaging in fan fiction. But I am not that kind of fan or at least not exactly. Indeed, I had a weekly ritual of watching *The Real World* and indeed I did often browse the internet to read what others were saying about the show but I did not ever participate in any message boards or discussion threads. I have been a lifelong lurker of various boards and forums that focus on various aspects of television not limited to TRW or RTV. Lurking refers to the act of reading but not ever contributing to a particular group or board (Baym 1997:105). This is not to say that I kept all of my thoughts to myself as often my ritual included discussing the latest episode with other friends who I had found a common interest. As Jenkins writes, “one becomes a fan not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some type of cultural activity by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a community of other fans who share common interests” (1988:98). According to this definition, I am a fan by not only sharing the content with friends but also by joining the community of other fans even if by doing so quietly, by only being a lurking reader.

Hills (2002) contends that Jenkins creates a moral dualism in his creation of the “good fan” and the “bad non-fan” in his early research. Hills maintains, “just as Barbara Hernstein Smith’s theory of good and bad imagined subjectivities would predict, Jenkins splits fans and non-fans into very different types of subjectivity, creating a moral dualism, by which I mean a view of the cultural world which constructs and focuses on two clear sets of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ phenomena” (2002:8). Hills argues that cultural studies is at a point where it is important to “theorise the media cult and its fandoms through a primary allegiance to the role of ‘fan’ and secondary allegiance to ‘academia’” (2002:10). This argument is an interesting parallel as to the role that the genre of reality television plays within our current popular culture. Annette Hill for example cites a UK report for the Campaign for Quality Television that singles out RTV as “the stuff of the vulgate” and as encouraging “moral and intellectual impoverishment in contemporary life” (2005: 7).

It is interesting that Annette Hill in her study of reality television argues: “reality TV is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (2005:2) as much like my chosen area of study, I too find myself in border territories straddling different worlds. As much as I may know of RTV in general and in particular of TRW I know there are fans who know much more about the show than I do who have cataloged myriad details because of how they have expressed their own fandom. As much as I have acquired the academic background to draw upon in the undertaking of this study, I know there are scholars who know more than I do because of their given areas of expertise and based on the length of time they have been exploring

this world. Even my fandom is expressed in this border territory, knowing a great deal about how several message boards work and who is who on the boards, but never committing to establishing myself as a full-fledged active member. Thus, the present work is situated within my own experience of the type of fandom that I know and am familiar with.

Research on the Internet: Going Online

As I discussed above, one of the rituals I have long held has been to visit the websites of several forums, discussion boards, blogs, and critiques given by consumers of TV, RTV, and TRW. As such many of the ideas being developed in the present work have been affected by the some of the things I have read in episode synopses, critiques by professional entertainment writers, critiques written by non-professional entertainment writers, articles that have been written about the show, as well as comments made by readers of all these forums. Since my initial foray into this world was not in the least with the intention of my observations ever becoming academic research, I never felt the need in any of the forums to introduce myself nor did I feel the need to introduce myself as an academic researcher. Despite not being an active participant in any of these media platforms, I treat this work as participant observation because many of my own observations about the show and in its representation of race were often confirmed by many of the posters of the various boards I have frequented. In addition they were confirmed or even challenged in the case of my own discussions with

friends who were also fans of the show⁵. Thus, it is important to situate this work in relation to the work done in the study of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as well as how it fits within the rich tradition of participant observation.

A great deal of research has emerged highlighting how cyber-ethnography can be an appropriate tool for studying online communities. As such one of the issues often highlighted is the extent to which an online forum can in fact become a community since participants are not traveling to one particular location and do not share the same geographic location or space. In their research of an online community centered around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that develops into a community offline as well Gatson and Zweerink argue,

Internet ethnographies are inherently multi-sited – even if you as the researcher stay onsite with a particular arena, and never follow links presented by community members. Although there are Internet groups/communities that limit communication to one online arena, one site, the network exchange itself is based on people sited in homes, offices, classrooms, public spaces, sitting in front of computers, and typing out their self-presentation from those dispersed sites (2004:180).

In Gatson and Zweerink's (2000) work there are several reasons that highlighted why the community under study was indeed a community which included the fact that there were specific rules the community established and that to act in anything but accordance with those rules meant that you could no longer be part of the group. In the present work, in the site proposed for this study there are not the same type of clearly delineated boundaries we might see in other online communities such as that described by other

⁵ In some cases these discussions were quite lively particularly with what I would now classify as anti-fans of the show. However, this term introduces a body of work (See for example Gray 2003) that for the purposes of this study will not be addressed.

researchers (see for example Gaston and Zweerink 2000 and Baym 2000). Still many of the characteristics are consistent with previous research such as the fact that regular reading of the site will give one a sense of who is a more active poster of episode summaries and utilizing ethnographic methods I was able to determine patterns in terms of frequency of posts by particular users as well as other content on the websites.

Sharf writes regarding the various formats such as those described above and because the Internet draws people together from various geographical locations that it is “increasingly perceived as an excellent source of data, not only for those collecting interview and survey responses but also for people who wish to analyze the discourse itself” (1999:244). Furthermore Sharf argues that due to the ability to archive and recall electronic messages at a later date Internet discourse lends itself to various analytic and ethnomethodological approaches including content analysis and participation observation studies (1999:244).

As I previously mentioned, I have never before identified as either a fan or a researcher in any of the various forums which I visit, and thus, I did not think it would be appropriate to do so now simply for the purposes of this research. Future research will enable the opportunity to do so allowing the time to develop the online relationships and to establish my own position within the board of my choosing. I treat this research as a first stage in many possible stages similar to Sharf’s own in a listserv that was originally about information concerning breast cancer. As Kendall states,

Researchers who instead make brief visits to forums to solicit respondents for interviews or surveys may find that people respond to these relatively anonymous strategies on the part of researchers by self-selecting for a preference for anonymity online. It can also be difficult to evaluate the

honesty of responses to such surveys and interviews when administered online (1999:71).

In the present work, because of my status as a long time fan of TRW and due to the fact that I have frequented many boards and especially those I will use to inform the current work, I am able to at least ascertain the veracity of the episode summaries posted by readers. Thus while my current work does not involve going out in the field in a particular community with clearly delineated boundaries in the traditional sense of ethnographic research, nor am I a true participant in the traditional sense of participant observation research, I am nonetheless indebted to these methodologies as they inform my own work.

In her work on soap operas, Baym brings together ethnographic research in order to write about a fan group (2000). Baym argues “the more we know about the show, the more we see on the television screen when we watch our soaps. The story taking place on the screen is designed to stimulate multiple interpretations, and the pleasure of creating those interpretations is the main appeal of soaps” (2000:70). Ford maintains that the more organized public discussions in online discussion boards add new layers to the interpretive and community-building processes but that these online practices have their roots in the offline communities that preceded them (2008). Accordingly, where in the past viewers and fans may have discussed with friends or family members the latest in a particular series, viewers and fans now may, and often do, take these interactions online. Kendall states, “Once online, participants draw on their off-line resources, as well as understandings gained in off-line experiences, to negotiate and interpret their on-line interaction” (1999:58). As a consequence, any discussions of categorical identities

follow us in CMC whether they are outwardly stated or not. (Though it is quite often the case that references to gender, racial identity, or other demographic information are made in the context of reader responses regarding posted information or are even used as predecessors to contextualize critiques or comments).

Costello and Moore found that online fandoms fit the models of interpretive communities where participants have an interest in a program, a desire to discuss the program, and access to the Internet (cited in Felschow 2010; Costello and Moore 2007). Felschow argues that an interpretive community does not passively receive media content, but actively creates meanings that are partly its own, shaped by its institutional, sociohistorical, and textual context (Felschow 2010: [2.6], Tulloch and Jenkins 1995:102). Thus, what these researchers demonstrate is that while we have new forums available to us to express our fandom in, fans are still well-versed in all of the divisions of society and bring these into the sites of research. Accordingly there is necessarily a varied response to the text on behalf of the viewer. Writing in 1995, Tulloch and Jenkins present “the ideal audience” in contrast to the “resistant and creative audience” that Felschow argues is now commonly associated with cult fandoms by academics (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995:4; Felschow 2010 [4.2]). In today’s market however Hills maintains that these “cult fans” may now have greater appeal to producers since it can become a loyal consumer base upon which to draw (Hills 2002; Felschow 2010). In any view of fandom while fans may perceive fans – in any expression of fandom – as more essential to the process, it would be unrealistic to perceive that this necessarily translates into a situation where fans have true power. Neither however would it be realistic to

believe that fans have no power at all. Rather the dynamic of power between producer and fan is more complex and active than perceiving either producer or fan as all powerful. It is important however to once again state that a great deal of this research on fandom has been centered around programs that are fictional. Reality television serves to complicate this dynamic because continuation of the program requires that there is a fan base, or at a minimum interest in the show, since future seasons are predicated on casting members from this population. Further, with RTV it programs can only be successful by having characters, cast members, or participants that are appealing to viewers. Mittell blogs, "Serial television is ultimately a character-centered form, as we need to care about the people we're spending time with in order to justify the hours of viewing and weeks of anticipation endemic to the form" (justv.wordpress.com 2010). While seasons of various RTV programming most often involve characters that we simply view for one season, the soap opera style of non-competitive RTV programming such as displayed by TRW operates in a similar way as serial television. Having located the present work within the context of the various disciplinary and methodological frameworks upon which it draws we now turn to the specific research tools employed in the present work.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

There are three research questions that guide this project. First, I am interested in uncovering the manners in which TRW cast members are presented to the audience.

RQ1: How are race and ethnicity constructed on TRW? Second, I am interested in uncovering the narratives of intergroup relations between members of racial and ethnic minority groups that are represented on the show. RQ2: How are race and ethnic relations constructed and portrayed on TRW? Last, I am interested in how viewers construct meaning in their reading of the show. While the producers may have a preferred reading of the material, prior research demonstrates that audiences are active in their construction of meaning and may not necessarily view the same image or scene in the same manner. Therefore it becomes necessary to look at how the viewers are constructing meaning. To be clear, herein I am primarily including my own viewing as part of the audience, and in particular as that of a fan as well as my critical, academic viewing of the show. Further, while I do pay some attention to some audience responses of others herein, this is not the focus of the current project since it is necessary to first establish the patterns of race present in TRW.

All of the issues that make this project attractive are those very same things that have made undertaking a methodology for this project challenging. First and foremost, it becomes necessary to draw upon fan studies for it is as a fan that I first became interested in TRW in the first place. My first exposure to the show came early in the

show's run and had me riveted ever since. Throughout the years as I have gained more vocabulary allowing me to study my media consumption through the eyes of an academic, my viewing of the show has shifted dramatically. By identifying as a fan, it becomes necessary to address the methodological and ethical concerns that researchers often face when the issue arises of whether objectivity is possible.

I treat this work as participant observation for I am a part of the community which is under study. By community I consider fans of RTV generally and fans of TRW specifically, even if my participation in this world is limited to the status of "lurker". Gans lauded participant observation as a useful method for studying understudied segments of our society. He argues of this method: "I also consider it the most scientific, because it is the one that gets close to people" (1999:540). Gatson (2011) asserts that lurking or reading online content is participant observation because most online information is read, and interpreted. Reading is its own form of interaction. As such, I am aware of the reflexivity especially needed in conducting qualitative research of this nature.

A second issue is that the primary concern of this project is in representations of race and ethnicity and race and ethnic relations. In analyzing these socially constructed categories it is necessary to address that often there are intersections with other categories such as class, gender, and sexuality. In some seasons it is easier to analyze the portrayals of these constructed categories as clearly issues of race. However it was a complication of these categories that sparked an interest in this project. Pedro Zamora of the San Francisco season was the first Latino character that was highlighted on the show

and previously the only other Latino character was Irene Barrera (later becoming Irene Barrera Kearns after her marriage, depicted on the show). Irene's time on the show is cut short since she leaves upon getting married. What made Pedro so memorable was that he was gay and had a public battle of living with AIDS while on the show. The disease claimed his life, according to a film later produced about Pedro, on the night the last episode of his season (San Francisco 1994) aired. During the show, attention was increasingly drawn to Pedro's medical condition through his involvement with the AIDS-activist community. However, by virtue of who Pedro was, his sexuality was inherently part of the construction of his character as portrayed on the show, which included his racial and ethnic status. Therefore, was this show, by highlighting the life, marriage, and activism of a gay Latino male with AIDS inherently challenging the *machismo* stereotype of Latino males? Again, while acknowledging that the categories we construct can be difficult to delineate by focusing mainly on race the project is more manageable⁶.

An additional complication of the show itself is that this show has spawned others such as *Road Rules* (which aired for 14 seasons) and perhaps more notably, *The Real World/Road Rules Challenge* (which has aired 19 seasons and is currently airing its 20th at the time of this writing and has since been renamed to just *The Challenge*). These shows are noteworthy and inform the current project in that many of the cast members who have appeared on *The Real World* will come back to appear in the various

⁶ Similarly, the category that this project focused on could have easily been gender, class, or the intersection of these socially constructed categories and therefore highlight an area that is ripe for future research as will be discussed in the conclusion.

Challenges. The most compelling characters are often sought after to return to compete in the Challenges for cash and prizes and follow a similar format to its predecessor where cast members are filmed in everyday activity but confessionals and interviews with unseen producers are interwoven to create a storyline. Confessionals were set up as diary rooms where cast members could go into a private room and film privately their thoughts about other roommates or situations occurring in the house. The viewing of these programs often can solidify, challenge, or even replace a previous view held of the cast members⁷.

One example lies with the Paris cast, specifically with CT and Adam. In this TRW season, many of the conflicts focused on the ethnocentric views of the “rural” Ace experiencing culture shock overseas, though the entire cast is shown in this light. As a recap from the website states: “Unlike previous seasons, the cast was confronted with the unique challenge of adjusting to a new culture.” This, despite a producer stating the cast never “encountered any anti-American sentiment” while filming and were disinterested in “world events” (Dehnart 2003). Adam’s struggles tended to focus on living with a famous father (William King of the Commodores) though there are confrontations between Adam and CT during the TRW season in which they were cast members, none are as heated as when CT and Adam both appear on *RW/RR Challenge: Duel 2*. In fact, they are both disqualified before the competition even begins. Figure 2 below is an actual photo from mtv.com found on the page where a brief episode

⁷ It is worth mentioning here that *The Challenges* also introduce non-TRW participants who then also go on to have a continued media presence and narrative. Many of the TRW participants then have a continued media presence because of their interactions with these new participants.

summary is included. Yet, both cast members are replaced by white cast member MJ and Black cast member Nehemiah. Interestingly, this allows the maintenance of the same racial composition of the original cast. Further, the ideology presented throughout the show of race and ethnic relations as largely a black versus white issue is maintained.



Figure 2 CT and Adam Fight. (from mtv.com)

Any discipline will have its theoretical debates within the field of study including disagreements over the meanings of categories that are constructed as in the case of studying an “audience” or a “fan”. In this particular arena, due to the interdisciplinary nature of television studies, there simply is no single path in terms of theoretical orientation or research methodology. As Kellner (1995) argues, traditionally research on television has focused on the areas of production, text, or reception. Production

typically places its emphasis on the political economy of how television programs are created and the effects of the economic structure and background through which television is produced. Text typically places its emphasis on the narrative and discourse of the actual text produced, the images shown, or other various forms of content produced within television. Lastly, reception refers to the myriad audience reception studies that have focused on the ways in which audiences perceive, react, or reject to images on television.

In this project, I focused on the produced texts as the sites of study. Specifically I relied heavily on mtv.com for cast member bios and episode summaries though I occasionally also utilized video or photos available from the site. To reiterate, because I wanted to pay some attention to audience reception, I also supplemented my critical, academic viewing of the show with select audience responses. One of the audience responses I used is that of a self-proclaimed fan of RTV. Through this blog, the author offers information, commentary, and criticism of RTV. As I discussed above, the view of the passive audience has been a part of media studies for quite some time. Ang criticizes the functionalist view of audiences for a flaw that Ang claims was reproduced in neo-Marxist critical theory. Ang argues, “In both cases the relative autonomy of the ‘receiving end’ outside and beyond the mass communicational order was unthinkable: the audience was merely a function of the systemic design, and privatized reception completely subjected to the requirements of centralized transmission” (1995:6). By utilizing some of both audience and fan interpretations of RTV and TRW, including my own as a fan, in this work the hope is that the audience is seen as being active in the

construction of meaning. It is important to note however that one cannot focus on audience reception without acknowledging the political economy of the production itself or without drawing upon the themes of the text itself in creating research questions or in deciding the focus of research projects.

Fiske (2011) maintains that the power of the audience not be overstated and that the power of the audience lies in its ability to negotiate the structures imposed upon them. Fundamentally, television in its present form is a business with the goal of building not only the biggest audience it can find but also in building a target audience to sell to advertisers. TRW itself as well as its network, MTV, offers a rich case study to truly uncover every aspect related to political economy and while this is not the primary focus of the current project one cannot completely separate what appears on the show from the political economy context. Jon Murray, the surviving producer⁸ and creator of the show from the Bunim-Murray team, himself cannot separate out the business side to the production as noted in this online interview. In response to the question, how does it feel to be considered the “father of reality television?” Murray states,

Well thank you for saying father and not grandfather! I know some people say that, I’m not sure it’s accurate. I am, I think, one person who is part of the evolution of reality television. Certainly we do get credit for being the first people who really took the documentary form and, sort of, stood it upside down and made it very commercial to compete with scripted programming. Because what we did was, rather than find seven young people who were living together in New York, we cast those seven young people for diversity. We structured the episodes the way you’d structure a drama, with an A and a B story (Parks 2009).

⁸ Mary-Ellis Bunim died at the age of 57 after a lengthy battle with breast cancer according to a 2004 news report (www.mtv.com).

In response to the question, were you surprised at the initial success of *The Real World* when it debuted in 1992, Murray states,

We knew from the moment we started shooting the pilot for the show that we had something very special. When it premiered, we didn't know what to expect. We prepared ourselves for the fact that it might be 13 lovely little episodes and it was a great experiment. But that very first show aired and the channel was averaging a 0.3 or 0.4 rating with its music videos, and bang, it tripled to 0.9! For the first time in MTV history there was appointment television, people were showing up at a specific time to watch something; they weren't just using the channel as a sort of wallpaper (Parks: 2009).

Both of these quotations highlight what make this show worthy of academic study. The first is the acknowledgement from a producer of the show, as well as the interviewer, that the show is seminal in shaping the genre of reality television, a sentiment echoed in other places as well (see for example Brown: 2010). The second is the acknowledgement that this reality television program appropriated documentary stylizing for pure commercialization and entertainment with popularity as its end goal. Last, within these quotes is the acknowledgement that the casting for "diversity" is purposeful.

These quotes also highlight the importance of ratings. This is an important aspect in the study of television culture as ratings systems propel not only the longevity of a show, but also the longevity of its characters, the actors who play those characters, and the mushrooming of shows attempting to recreate unearthed 'formulas' of success. Ratings and other systems, as Ryan and Wentworth note, are a signal of the participatory (therefore dynamic and not unidirectional) nature of consumption in television; and thus, help define its evolved social function into that of cultural agent,

A market-based media economy turns the audience member into a 'consumer,' and not merely an informed citizen or a partner in media-shared culture. On the basis of assessments of audience participation, as measured by subscriptions sold, Nielsen ratings, and other market surveys, individuals become stars, shows become 'hits', stations and newspapers can attract advertising revenue, and media products (shows) are selected (1999:17).

This quote once again shows the synergistic relation between the audience, the participants, and the producers.

Casting and the Emphasis on Diversity

Casting for MTV's *The Real World* is an extensive process and one that has changed over the many seasons of the show. Jonathan Murray, one of the producers and co-creator for the show speaks to this in an interview,

Once any show has been through its first season, you have to really examine the reasons why someone wants to be on a program. That first season, in 1992, we were all virgins, the crew and the cast. [. . .] But what we look for are people who do this because they want to be exposed to people different from themselves, want to challenge themselves and grow (Eby 2010).

Still he acknowledges that due to the increased presence of RTV programming it may now be more difficult to find suitable cast members,

The biggest difference now is everyone's seen reality shows and casting has become more of a challenge because you have to find people for whatever reality show that you truly think are right for that show, but aren't just another person who wants to be on a reality show – and if they don't get in choice A, they'll do choice B or choice C (Adalain 2011).

As such, it has become increasingly important to move beyond simply those who are self-selecting participant members,

We have found, certainly in the last 10 years, that you want to not only talk to the people who send in a tape or come to an open call. You want to go out and meet people who hadn't thought of applying to be on "The

Real World." There was a girl on the D.C. season, Emily, who was working at a Starbucks that was a couple doors down from where we were casting in Columbia, Mo. The casting director went to get some coffee and met her, and found her really interesting, and she was invited over for an interview (Eby 2010).

In response to a question about what characteristic cast members should have Murray answers,

Well we still look for charismatic personalities, people who have a sense of humor, someone who expresses themselves in an interesting way, someone who has a look that's interesting or attractive, someone who has an interesting background. Usually people that have had to overcome things in their lives are more interesting than those who have had a smooth and easy life (Adalain 2011).

Perhaps most revealing is the following, "[W]e really want someone who's coming on the show because they want to experience living with six other diverse people" (Ibid).

Despite that the show purports to be "real" so much so that this term is included in its title, the producers are actively engaged in seeking out individuals who have a particular story to tell. In a press release cited by a school newspaper from the city in which

Bunim/Murray Productions was holding auditions, casting directors state,

It is important to us that "The Real World" reflects the diversity of the general population. This season [Season 25 Las Vegas] we'd love to include a person who is physically challenged, an individual struggling with weight issues, someone who has been affected by a natural disaster, a cast member who is a product of home or alternative schooling, a follower of a non-mainstream religion or belief system, an elite athlete, a recent graduate affected the economic downturn, a young widow/widower, and an individuals who wants to bring the spotlight of "The Real World" to a cause, condition, or social issue they care deeply about or are personally affected by (*The Daily Athenaeum* staff 2010)

Additionally, Murray himself discusses the purposeful casting that takes place by stating,

We try to reach out to communities whose numbers might not necessarily apply to be on the show. In New Orleans, we have a young woman who is Muslim, because we did outreach to that community. We've done that from the beginning; we did a big outreach to the HIV/AIDS community in Season 3 and we found Pedro (Eby 2010).

This theme of diversity is included even when talking about issues beyond the show.

Recently, Sean Duffy Season 6 Boston was elected to Congress in Wisconsin's Seventh Congressional District. Murray claims that TRW was good preparation for politics,

There's a lot of things that I think about "The Real World" that I think would help someone eventually if they decide to run for government. I think the very nature of being in a house with six other very different people than yourself and having to get beyond the very obvious differences between us and see people for who they are. I think [that] makes you a better person. So I think it is great preparation for someone who wants to be in government and who wants to represent all the people in the district (Dehnart 2010g).

Repeatedly, the creator maintains that its casting is purposeful in its diversity perhaps explaining why so many former RW participants continue on as diversity issues speakers.

This issue of diversity is critically important as the move towards purposeful casting is what begins to get at this question of how race and race and ethnic relations are constructed on TRW. It also creates a developing area of research – one that has the potential to show the conflation and the tension of the audience between viewing something they know is entertainment but also that what they are viewing is not scripted. Previous research (e.g., Jhally and Lewis 1992) highlights that even when there is a gap between the social reality of the audience and media images, the audience had difficulty in separating out Bill Cosby the actor from Cliff Huxtable the character despite the show very clearly being a fictional one despite, arguably, the title of the show. What then will

occur when the images are purported to be strictly speaking “reality”? As such, the first research question of the current project asks what has been produced in terms of casting and production. To get at this research question, I am most interested in uncovering the ways in which the cast members are constructed prior to viewing. I argue that the terminology that is selected in introducing viewers to the cast members reveals quite a great deal in terms of both what the expectations of behavior are going to be not only for the individual cast member themselves but also for the expectations of behavior that will guide the interaction between him/her and other cast members.

It is beyond the scope of this project to provide a complete text/discourse analysis of a series that has been on the air since 1992 and has produced 24 seasons that have aired and a 25th that is currently airing (at the time of writing) . It would also seem insufficient to do what other researchers before have done which is to simply utilize one season as a focal point. Therefore I utilize various methods and sources to inform this study as Hobson (1982) also does in her work on *Crossroads*.

First, I include a general discourse analysis that draws upon the cast member biographies available on mtv.com. This accomplishes the task of providing a brief history of the various cast members as depicted by the producers to the extent their descriptions on the show’s website frame and inform audiences as to how they should view the actions of the cast members. It is important here to note that these cast member biographies are taken at least in some part from cast member auditions or applications. In some seasons where video is available of audition tapes or initial producer interviews the audience member can see some of these descriptions coming from the participants

themselves either as a response to a question the casting directors have asked or through their own audition submissions. For example, in Season 3 San Francisco, Pam's cast member biography is almost verbatim her first confessional shown as she is introducing herself to the rest of the cast members. These cast member biographies are critical in understanding and uncovering what the producers found "interesting" and the extent that patterns exist in what those "interesting" themes might be.

For the first season of TRW there are several key phrases that directly relate to the concerns of this project. For example Norm is described as the show's "lone gay castmember". Further, the episode summary states: "racial tensions heat up between Kevin and the roomies". Upon viewing the biographies of the characters, Kevin is described "as struggling to overcome many of the issues facing African American men." He is also described as having strong beliefs he is willing to argue, being the oldest roommate, and also as having difficulty relating to his roommates. In reading Julie's biography, she is described in a different manner than is Kevin: "Julie's innocence, engaging personality and desire to learn about the world make her the darling of the loft." She is also described as the youngest of the roommates and as leaving Alabama for the first time. Hence the biographies convey the specific ways in which Kevin and Julie are framed, informing the possible interpretation of their actions by viewers as young, innocent, white Julie in direct contrast to older, struggling, Black Kevin.

Second, I include a general discourse analysis that draws upon the episode summaries for each episode of each season available on mtv.com. As an example, the show's website provides a brief summary of the season. This is important in

determining the framing of certain events and interactions that take place on the show. In some cases I include how the episode summaries frame the interactions and compare how the viewing and my own interpretation of that viewing may differ.

The main focus of this project lies in the claim that TRW informs the audience in terms of ideas on race and ethnicity. These biographies serve as the starting point for what behaviors viewers should expect of the cast member themselves. These cast member bios then can reveal a great deal about the underlying themes presented in the show. These themes are about not only how we view racial and ethnic minority members themselves but also in terms of interpersonal relations.

One of the most critical moments of the show came in the first season when Kevin engages in a heated discussion about race with Julie (1992 Season 1 Episode 11). In this very powerful storyline Kevin is portrayed as an “angry black male” who is domineering in his view against innocent, rural Julie. Julie fears for her life and safety and the image of Kevin standing over and shouting at Julie who is pressed against a wall is one of the show’s most iconic moments. These photos, Figures 3 and 4 below, available on the show’s website provide imagery that further help to contextualize this relationship between Julie and Kevin and their respective portrayals on the show.



Figure 3 Kevin and Julie Arguing. (from mtv.com)



Figure 4 Julie is Upset over the Confrontation with Kevin. (from mtv.com)

This photo (Figure 4) is also accompanied by the following text: “Julie is upset about her confrontation with Kevin.”

This event becomes a prototype for how race and ethnic relations are then portrayed on the show. Intergroup relations are often portrayed in terms of misunderstanding between the more jaded urban youth and the naïve rural youth. Furthermore, they are often portrayed from the vantage point that ignores the structural issues that frame race and ethnic relations in this society. For everyone everywhere holds prejudiced, and potentially racist, attitudes that can be overcome with patience, understanding, and education. In fact a staple of the show is that the cast member who has “learned” the most throughout the season or who has undergone the most transformation is the cast member who is the last to leave and often has the concluding remarks for the season. During some seasons these final concluding remarks have included how much they have learned about “other” people. This, I argue is often code for people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Again, here it is important to analyze how the show itself presents the information to viewers.

In addition to the analyses of the cast member biographies and reading of the episode summaries, I supplement these results with my own viewing of the show’s 25-season run. I have watched every episode of TRW with the exception of some missed episodes of Season 4 London due to inaccessibility to cable during this time. In many instances I have viewed the shows multiple times. This is especially true of the early seasons (seasons one through seven) since one of the network’s staples was to have marathons of the previous seasons. This was fairly commonplace until many of the cast

members attempted to start a union of RTV stars which was alluded to in the first big reunion of all cast members from all seasons for its tenth anniversary.

One of the problems encountered in conducting this research is that there is no single mode of concurrent delivery for all 25 seasons of TRW. Again, though the focus of this research is on the text that is produced, it is unavoidable to face the economic realities of the industry. In the early seasons of the show, music was included in the episodes that made licensing an issue for distribution. In fact, though the first season is available on DVD, the music that is used in the DVD is different from the music that was used while the show was airing. While in later seasons songs that appear on the show are licensed for free (Dehnart 2005b). At the time of writing, Season 1 New York and Season 12 Las Vegas are available for purchase on DVD. HuluPlus has added the first four seasons of the show. iTunes has available for purchase the complete seasons 17 – 23 with the exception of Season 19 Sydney. The current season has selected episodes available for purchase. Mtv.com also indicates that there are episodes available for viewing, however the links are not always working or the episodes are not always available. For the purposes of this research, I relied quite heavily on clips or episodes available on YouTube. Since YouTube has as part of its agreement that users are not to upload copyrighted material, this also has its own set of problems as many of the episodes are often not available for very long. However, I do note that the availability of TRW, whether through clips, entire episodes, or seasons, on YouTube in and of itself is a testimonial to the popularity of the show and therefore its importance as a research

subject. Further, many of the clips uploaded are also testament to the importance placed on some of the interactions I discuss in subsequent sections.

In order to make the claim that this show informs viewers about issues of race and ethnicity it becomes necessary to rely not solely on my own viewing as both an academic and fan, but to draw upon the thoughts of other viewers – fan, academic or otherwise– of the show. Since part of the focus of the present work is to raise the question of how viewers are receiving the representations of race, the original intent was to include a content analysis of episode summaries available on tv.com. According to Frommer (2008), tv.com was launched in 2005 and has been referred to as a “digital water cooler” where visitors can make contributions such as providing episode summaries or add information to existing summaries of various television shows, including TRW. However, upon looking at the episode summaries in many of the seasons they are simply the copied and pasted episode summaries that are available directly from mtv.com. Thus, these summaries were not included in the research.

However, because I did not want to rely solely on my own viewing as representative of all viewers, I therefore include other select readings of the show. I chose one blog in particular, realityblurred.com, because of my long-term following of this blog. I include this as a portion of the results and analysis because I do not feel it is sufficient to only include my viewing and interpretation of events and scenes as representative of all fans of TRW. While there is some overlap in interpretation of events, there are also key distinctions which will be addressed. In the analyses I also include other articles which have been published about TRW, whether academic or not.

All of what has been written about TRW requires an interpretation and an assessment be made about the writer's own viewing of the show and thus include this as part of the audience reception I incorporated in this research. I also have included work written by former cast members because in some cases this also provides an alternative viewing of events.

While the cast member biographies and episode summaries are available for public viewing and arguably are provided for that sole purpose, Internet research requires addressing ethical concerns regarding privacy. Because the information that was utilized in this research is publicly available on the corporate website for the network airing the show I treated this information as public domain. In the case of relying on the realityblurred.com website, since the author of the website has become a public figure by serving as commentator to many outside news sources and regularly includes links to these sites I also treated that information as information that was to be consumed by the public. Though the original intent of the research was to have included reception of viewers who were not necessarily professional or academic, the end result was that the information that was utilized in the research was professional or academic. In the case of Andy Dehnart of realityblurred.com, while he may not have begun with the intention of becoming a professional he has recently become a regular commentator in various news outlets. Having situated the research questions of this project, we now turn to presenting the data examining the various issues of race and ethnicity.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In analyzing the cast member bios and the episode summaries presented on mtv.com, clear patterns emerge in terms of casting and often, storylines. Additionally, in viewing the seasons over time, it is easy to see that while the show has undergone significant changes there are still formulas that are followed in terms of what is presented to the audience.

TRW presents itself as a window into the lives of young people and that the producers have a strict hands-off approach. However, increasingly the show evolved into depicting “youth” as a 21 year-old college student that is completely immersed into wholly unreal situations. Season 1 of the show highlights young people living in a loft doing fairly ordinary things. The concept of “fairly ordinary things” is all relative as the show depicts young people trying to pursue various careers in entertainment. Still, we often see the cast hanging out and talking to each other as ordinary people living together would normally do. Over time this evolves into the cast living in a penthouse, luxury hotels in Cancun, or big mansions. Rather than let them “live” their lives, the cast members are given jobs or projects to work on together. In some seasons these jobs have included working with children, running businesses, or simply serving as party hosts. Arguably these manipulations are in an effort to counteract two things. First, Jon from Season 2 Los Angeles proved to be a realization of the producers’ worst fears. Jon was so often depicted as being so out of sorts in Los Angeles that he is portrayed as

being too fearful to leave the home. Much of his footage shows him sitting in front of the television. Televisions are visibly removed from subsequent seasons. Second, the promise of the show's long standing introduction is that the audience will be privy to witnessing "what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real."

Consequentially, even though the producers claim no intervention, how better than to create tensions than by forcing the roommates to not only live together but also work together?

Constructing the Cast Members

A breakdown of patterns and themes that emerge in the process of how race and ethnicity is constructed, portrayed, and represented is the first step in my analysis.

Again, because this aspect of the research is utilizing primarily the cast member bios and episode summaries provided on mtv.com, this is from the producers' standpoint. Even when the words themselves may have been taken from the cast members' own interactions, it is still the producers who choose to highlight the specific phrases that are then used as constructions of the cast members. When one considers that TRW is one of the first second-generation reality television programs to hit the airwaves, uncovering these patterns is critically important as the show provided a template not just for its own future editions but also for the extant reality programming that has since emerged.

Trying to capture a picture of who makes up the cast members selected to appear on TRW becomes quite problematic as the cast member bio constructions themselves have changed over time. In some years the age and hometown of the cast members are included while in other seasons this information is excluded. In some seasons the level

of education is revealed for each member but in others this information is excluded. Since the focus of this study is in analyzing issues related to race and ethnicity, even determining the racial and ethnic background of the cast members themselves is very difficult. In some cases the racial and ethnic identity of the cast member is included as descriptors while in others it is not. Acknowledging that the boundaries between one category and another are not always fixed or rigid, there are certainly emergent patterns. In using a broadly constructed category of white versus non-white to get a sense of racial and ethnic portrayal of the 187 cast members to date, 62% (n = 116) are categorized as white. In utilizing the cast member bios only without added information that comes from viewing the program, 48% (n = 90) of the cast members are college-educated or enrolled and 18 of the cast members are introduced as non-straight.

The first step in analyzing the cast members is to present a breakdown of the various racial and ethnic minority groups. For the purposes of classification, acknowledging that it was indeed not a perfect or easy categorization, I use the racial/ethnic categories of: Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Bi-Racial. I also include a discussion on the category of Muslim. I use these categories because these are the groups that I believe have been racialized (as discussed previously by Omi and Winant) by the producers. In some instances the cast members are labeled using these various identities. Of the 187 cast members, only 41 give any indication of racial or ethnic background in their bios. Some of these phrases include “a 19 year-old African American”, “comes from a traditional Cuban family”, “a striking mixed heritage – Filipino and Irish”. In other cases, a judgment was made based on information provided

in the bio or presented in the show itself⁹. Of these categories, Black is the largest category with 32 cast members being classified as Black. It is important to note here that the Bi-Racial category was introduced because the producers themselves introduce the category.

It is probable that this decision may have been influenced due to the fact that the 2000 Census was the first time individuals were able to report more than one race. Of the total population, 2.4 percent (6.8 million people) reported as more than one race (Hobbs and Stoops 2002:84). It is also important to note that of the 13 cast members that are presented as bi-racial eight are depicted as being part Black. This trend does reflect some of the demographic changes taking place in the United States. The Census reports that 34.7 million reported Black alone and 36.4 million reported Black alone or in combination with one or more other races (Hobbs and Stoops 2002: 74). The next category is Hispanic and this includes 15 cast members of the 187 total members cast. While the category of Hispanic can include members of any race, between 1980 and 2000 the Hispanic population more than doubled in size reaching a population of 35.3 million at the century's close (Hobbs and Stoops 2002: 78). Of importance is that despite that a 2004 Census report indicating that 4.2 percent of the United States population reported they were Asian, there have only been four Asian cast members of the 187 cast throughout the show's 25 season run (Reeves and Bennet 2004: 1). More

⁹ This was quite problematic as well. For example, in at least one case it was not until after a re-viewing of the show did I even catch that one of the characters introduced herself as being a quarter-black. This is not mentioned in her biography and does not seem to reappear in any of the storylines of the season and my interpretation of her race was certainly not Black. Therefore she is at least one character who is not included in these numbers and highlights race not only as an ongoing social construction but in terms of how different viewings can produce different interpretations. This specific scene is highlighted in a later section.

importantly, all four Asian cast members have been women. In addressing the lack of representation of Asian men on the show, people are generally quick to ask whether Asian men are auditioning for the show. While the show does not release information on individuals who submit applications, the network launched *Randy Jackson Presents: America's Best Dance Crew*. Though this is admittedly a different type of show than TRW, the show predominantly casts Asian men in its dance competition. Many of the winning dance crews have featured Asian men and at least one winning team is entirely made up of Asian men. Since the network specifically caters to young people, it is hard to argue Asian males are not depicted on the show simply because they are not auditioning or participating in RTV.

In analyzing the cast member bios alone, there are startling themes that become apparent. One involves the concept of “all-American”. The term “all-American” appears in four cast bios: Mike Season 10 Back to New York, Kyle Season 11 Chicago, Steve Season 12 Las Vegas, and CJ Season 22 Cancun. Mike is described as the “quintessential all-American boy”. Kyle is described as “all-American golden boy”. Steven is described as the “very picture of all-American charisma”. Lastly, CJ is described as “the All-American boy”. The implicit statement communicated is that the notion of what “American” becomes connected with whiteness as all members where this phrase is used are white cast members. Additionally, it is worthy to note that three of the four mentions also associate all-American with “boys” and not men.

A more startling theme involves the concept of beauty and attractiveness. Increasingly a premium has been placed on placing attractive people in front of the

camera as identified in the discussion on the producer's choice in casting above. In looking for terms such as "beauty", "beautiful", "stunning", "gorgeous", and "good looks", 27 female cast member bios include some reference to this broadly constructed category I call physically attractive. I say that the category is broadly constructed because I make assumptions that an aspiring model and a former beauty Queen are designed to be read as attractive. Of the references, only three are used in describing African Americans: Shavonda who is described as "a beautiful African American young woman" Coral who is described as "as intelligent and witty as she is beautiful", and Irulan who is described as having had "a premium placed on her beauty". Devyn who is described as a former beauty queen and "may be easy on the eyes" I would also include in this category. In including the bi-racial or multi-racial cast members that are part-Black, this would include another five cast members for a total eight versus 27.

Turning to males, the number is even more imbalanced between white cast members and Black cast members. There are 22 mentions of what would be considered physically attractive. This includes terms such as "handsome", "good looks", "adorable" and "blessed with 1940s matinee idol looks". Still there are only five mentions of these terms in describing African American males. These cast members are Alton who is described as "strikingly handsome", Will who is described as "cute", Ty who is described as "handsome", and Eric who is described as "known for his dreamy eyes is a handsome ladies' man". These two categories are deceptively important because the show sets up simply through cast member bios as explicitly frame non-white cast

members are not American and not attractive relative to white cast members who do in fact share these qualities.

Throughout the show's run, we also see that varying forms of whiteness can exist. Often these forms are depicted through a function of other statuses such as education, class, or region. These forms appear in the descriptors utilized such as "typical fraternity guy", "sorority girl", "Southern belle", and "Southern gentleman" for example. Most often however the show uses juxtaposition or opposition to employ categories in describing cast members. For example, the following is from Mike's (Season 23 DC) bio,

In high school, Mike was the typical jock...a star athlete, prom king, popular with all the girls...an all around golden child from a Christian family. But that's where the stereotype ends. Mike realized several years ago that, for him, love knows no gender. He dates guys and girls, and is still questioning whether he's bi-sexual or gay.

In choosing to acknowledge the stereotype of a star athlete, prom king, all around golden and Christian child, the show then also depicts Mike's sexuality as breaking from this stereotype. Hence, at once perpetuating these characteristics cannot also exist in conjunction with gayness, i.e. the typical jock cannot also be gay. Another example lies with Alton Season 12 Las Vegas. In a video featuring unseen clips, one of the bonus features is a snippet of Alton's casting interview (2002). In the interview he claims to be the "whitest Black guy" you would meet because his favorite activities include playing the violin and rock climbing. Even within the cast members themselves there is a reference that different types of whiteness can exist. In Season 2, born and raised in Dublin, Ireland Dominic says of Owensboro, Kentucky native Jon, "Jon is white, real,

real white. I don't think we could be more different unless I had antlers sticking out of my head or something" (1993 Season 2 Los Angeles Episode 3).

Season 3 San Francisco features a well-known cast due to Pedro's popularity. One of the members of this cast is Cory who is a 22 year-old junior at University of California-San Diego whose major is undecided. The episode summary for "White Like Me" informs the audience that "a group visit to the Upper Room poetry reading featuring Mohammed leaves Cory feeling dull and ordinary" (www.mtv.com). Though the title of the episode is meant to clearly feature an issue of race, much of it features Cory's struggles with finding herself and what she wants to do with her life. Perhaps what is most revealing in the show's construction of the meaning of "white" comes from this episode.

At the poetry reading, the theme of the evening is "Black Love". Mohammed's father is highlighted in the episode performing a reading that begins with the lines "I've got African blood flowing in me. I've got Native American blood in me. And I've got white blood flowing in me. It's something we don't look at." Intertwined between this scene and Mohammed himself reading is a confessional of Cory, "His father has created such an incredible place for people of their culture to come together and talk about their common experiences". Later when they are back at the house, Cory is talking to Pam, Judd, and Puck:

Cory: I have never felt so white in my life. Because, I felt like gosh, I'm so freaking boring. I have no major cause. I have no, really, close connection to my culture, and my history, and my race. It's like when you have to search through so many feelings and so many fears and so much pain and find words for it, it kinda makes you a stronger person and gives you direction."

Judd: I think you covet the struggle, that you're jealous of the . . .

Cory: No, I'm not jealous of the struggle. I'm trying to say at first I felt really bad, like, oh my gosh I'm so boring and so ordinary and look at this. Look at them and how . . .

Judd: But you're not boring or ordinary because you haven't been persecuted that doesn't mean . . . You're not boring or ordinary because you haven't had to overcome something.

The scene ends as Judd informs us in the confessional that Cory felt like she should be tackling something bigger (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 3).

I argue this episode, and this scene in particular, is pivotal in understanding the dynamics of race as constructed on TRW. The title alone references the book authored by John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (1977). In this book, Griffin undergoes medical treatments to become Black in appearance and presents the overall theme of identity as it relates to race. The memoir highlights that neither race, Black nor White, has an understanding of the other and also how through an attempt to understand another race, he learned about his own identity. In this episode of TRW, superficial as it may have been, Cory is opening her world by attending a poetry reading presumably in an effort to learn about "their" culture as she phrases it but in doing so highlights her own sense of whiteness.

This episode is also pivotal for its portrayal of Cory's own lack of understanding when it comes to issues of race. In the episode Cory is upset because she has upset Mohammed's girlfriend, Stephanie, because Cory asks about the lightness of her skin. Stephanie is upset because Cory doesn't understand that Black people can have light skin. Her confessional is interspersed between her retelling of the event to Pedro and his boyfriend Sean (who is Black).

- Cory: It's just so weird, you know, that you can do something that means nothing to you and it's so offensive to other people.
- Sean: Are you still feeling bad about that?
- Cory: Yeah.
- Pedro: (to confessional) Cory was a little bit upset and she told us that she asked Mohammed's girlfriend whether she was part white.
- Cory: She immediately, like, got defensive and asked me right off the spot, 'Why did you say that? Is it because my skin's light?' And I said . . . yeah. That was why.
- Cory: (confessional) I guess the question really offended her and I felt really bad.
- Sean: Don't kill yourself with saltine crackers over this.
- Cory: (confessional) The people I live with are from such different political backgrounds, such different religious backgrounds. And so, all of a sudden, what seemed normal and real and absolute is just crumbling into a bunch of questions.
- Cory: Good night boys. Men. Guys. Whatever. I hope I didn't offend you by calling you boys (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 3).

Cory confirms the producer and co-creator's claim that indeed the show casts people from diverse backgrounds. Later in the episode, however, Mohammed absolves Cory of any guilt and also absolves Stephanie of any wrong-doing for getting upset over a question of race. He tells Cory that he understands she was asking out of curiosity and that her question was "no big deal" since Stephanie has had to deal with it all her life. He insists that things shouldn't "linger" since he is the kind of person who believes that if "anything's out there, let's talk about it and get it out". This scene ends with both Latino Pedro and Asian Pam discussing their own issues with identity themselves. Pam's statements are of particular importance since she discusses the fact that she did not know until four or five years before appearing on the show that Oriental refers to objects and that Asian refers to people. Pam's statements of accountability are of particular importance because she states: "You have to be held accountable for what's in

your own conscience” but then also questions how people can be held accountable for things that they do not know about. Grounded in the discussion is the message that we all have issues with identity regardless of racial or ethnic background (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 3).

More importantly, I believe this scene sets in motion a set of dynamics which assume that white cast members should be excused for asking any questions about race, even if they may be offensive, of any minority cast member and that the minority cast members should be willing to “teach” about their own minority status. This is a sentiment echoed by Melissa Season 9 New Orleans, “I get this feeling that, being a person of color on the show, you're automatically thrown into the role of teacher” in a newspaper article describing her experience on the show (Deggans and Persaud 2002). By each – white and person of color – playing their respective roles, each helps fulfill one of the show’s overarching themes that through individual communication and understanding, all things can be overcome, especially issues of race.

In Season 6 Boston, for example, one of the episodes highlights the friendship between Sean and Syrus. In Sean’s confessional he describes Syrus as “his first really Black friend” since he “doesn’t really know a lot of Black people” (1997 Season 6 Boston Episode 6). Syrus is then shown in his confessional talking about how he and Sean are complete opposites. While he is a city boy, Sean is a Wisconsin boy. While he is from the warm weather, Sean is from the cold. While he does the “interracial thing” as far as friendship and dating, Sean has not done “that”. In Sean’s confessional, he explains that although Syrus has several white friends, Syrus has also been discriminated

against “a lot of White people.” Interspersed throughout these shots are images of Syrus performing free style rap and Sean imitating his version though Syrus is sure to tell him that he is a bad hip-hopper. At the end of the scene, Sean informs the confessional that because they both come from such different walks of life, they both then have a great deal to learn from each other and the scene ends with Sean and Syrus walking down the street together.

Later in the same episode, Sean and Syrus have a conversation about whether or not “the Black man” is doing better now than he was 30 years ago. Sean explains that because he sees that “the Black man” is better off that this illustrates a change for the better. Sean goes on to explain that he believes that if both he and Syrus went to apply for a government job, the job would go to Syrus because of affirmative action. He does not believe that because his grandfather enslaved Syrus’s grandfather that he should be punished for this action (1997 Season 6 Boston Episode 6). Here, Sean is illustrating what Omi and Winant call rearticulation (1986: 84). They maintain, “The rearticulation of pre-existing racial ideology as a dual process of *disorganization* of the dominant ideology and of *construction* of an alternative, oppositional framework (84 - 85; emphasis in original). In this exchange, Sean conjures up “the past is the past” storyline, as evidenced by Bonilla-Silva (2006:113), and that it was not he himself who owned slaves is another storyline often employed by whites (116). As Bonilla-Silva argues, “the ‘It wasn’t me approach’ of this storyline does not fit the reality of how racial privilege operated and still operates in America” (119). The focus once again becomes on how individual actions are responsible for overcoming difference as the scene ends

with Jason explaining that it is the open communication that will help everyone learn from each other. Moore states, “Through liberal individualism, whites can make claims about fairness by asserting that equality simply means treating all individuals the same, while ignoring the structural disadvantage from which minorities suffer” (2008:123). Hence, Sean’s remarks are not only not construed as racist in nature, his remarks can be construed as “color-blind” for it is through one’s own merits that one can achieve. Further, it is through liberal individualism that problems of race can be overcome. This is a central principle of how issues of race are constructed and framed on TRW season after season.

Constructing the Cast Members by Racial Group

In order to understand the overarching theme of how race is framed on the show, it is necessary to look at how specific groups are portrayed on the show. What follows is a breakdown of patterns that emerge by analyzing each of the groups that was identified beginning with African American men.

Black men are the most often represented minority group, $n = 22$. These men are described as shown in the table on page 104 along with a summary of key phrases selected as descriptors taken from the cast member biographies available on mtv.com. In analyzing these key terms, there are several themes that emerge. One of the most readily apparent themes in the cast member bios is in how the producers choose to frame a large portion of these males from the standpoint of having family issues of some sort. Nehemiah Season 16 Austin has, according to his biography, a mother who is in rehab and as a result Nehemiah “was forced to grow up quickly and become a survivor.” Ty,

Season 23 DC is cast as having been abandoned by his biological parents and being shuffled around foster homes until being adopted at age five. He describes his upbringing being in a part of Baltimore that he compares to *The Wire*. Preston Season 24 New Orleans is framed as having been abandoned by his mother at age 17 and his first childhood memory is of crying in the back seat as his mother went to “score crack.” Leroy Season 25 Las Vegas has several of these “issues” themes including having a birth mother who is an alcoholic and drug abuser, living with foster parents, and living with a family that practiced “tough love.”

In particular, in several cases the family issue that these young men are facing is one vis-à-vis their fathers. Stephen Season 7 Seattle is framed as someone who met his father for the first time when he was 17. Jacquese Season 14 San Diego is cast as a young man who reluctantly took on the role of “man of the house” because of a father who was not present. Even more problematic for the view of Black fatherhood that is presented in these cast bios is that even when fathers are present, there are still issues, as in the case of Adam Season 13 Paris and Nick Season 20 Hollywood. Adam has a father who has spent most of his time away from his family while touring as an R&B musician. Nick is framed as having a very close relationship with his family despite the unresolved issues he has with his father. The same summation of absentee father is also surmised in the biography of Alton Season 12 Las Vegas. From his biography we learn: “Alton harbors a great deal of unresolved pain due to a major family tragedy.” We also learn as a “navy brat” he lived all over the world and most recently lived with his mother. While the biography does not explicitly state that there is a division between him and his father,

living with only his mother implies just that. Father issues are also present in Tyrie's (Season 18 Denver) storyline as the biography informs the audience that he was raised by a father from a military background in a strict and aggressive upbringing which "served as the main roadblock for a healthy father-son relationship."

These trends corroborate what previous studies have shown in considering messages sent in analyzing Black families in television. Smith states, "Some of these messages include the Black family as female-headed, characterized by conflict, and having children in the home who experience little supervision and concern from their parents" (2008:394). Reality television serves to complicate portrayals because of the insistence that despite the heavy editing and creation of storylines there is always an element of "real" to what is presented. Therefore anything that is presented to the audience can only be presented because this is what is real. In a show that purports itself to be a window into literally the "real" world, examining presentations of Black families reveals the messages that are being sent to viewers. Smith states,

Negotiating this tension is the commonly accepted belief that African American shows that feature content about prejudice, discrimination, and racism is counterproductive because it alienates substantial sections of the viewing audience who would struggle with identifying with such issues and/or be uncomfortable in being forced to see their own role in these social ills. Given this context, it stands to reason that shows featuring Black fathers/families are likely to focus on success; however, the invisibility of how the realities of race must be confronted in order to obtain professional and material success must be contested. If nothing else, one could argue that introducing such obstacles into established storylines would enhance the attractiveness of the show especially when racial barriers, in the end, are successfully overcome. While superficial treatment of such issues may further perpetuate beliefs that racism is easily overcome, it could also help to draw attention to continual forms of race-based oppression (2008:409).

Certainly in looking at the biographies of the African American men cast on the show we see that in several biographies it is specifically stated that indeed these men have been able to succeed despite these trying experiences. Jacquese's biography references his 'tenacious work ethic and drive' and end with the following statement: "At a young age, he had to learn to take care of himself and stayed motivated to succeed."

Nehemiah's biography labels him a survivor. Ty's biography begins with "Ty is not one to let the worst get the best of him." Preston's biography includes the sentiment:

"Despite a rough childhood, he's somehow managed to grow into a carefree individual who walks to the beat of his own drum." Leroy's biography states that he has "continued to keep a positive outlook toward making a better life for himself. Without a college education or a secure family, Leroy learned to become entirely self-reliant and credits his past experiences with making him a better man." Tyrie's biography states: "Today, Tyrie makes an effort to leave his past behind and remain focused and determined to succeed in life." In treating each of these characters as characters who have overcome any hardships through sheer force of will as Smith argues above audiences are disavowed of any contribution whatsoever to the state of our society. For only through individual hard work and determination are any social ills overcome. Thus reinforcing an image of black males that includes the treatment that if they are not experiencing success it can only be a result of a lack of hard work and determination – attributes that no other individual can help with.

Bell-Jordan (2008) examines race on RTV and utilizes the TRW Denver Season in her analysis. As part of her research she notes that in this season, six of the 28

episodes related to race and or racial conflict (358). Despite constructing Tyrie as someone who has overcome hardships prior to the viewing of the show, the actual representation of Tyrie in the show is quite different. Furthermore from the cast biography we also learn that Tyrie is a former gang member. Bell-Jordan states,

Episode after episode, we see Tyrie in conflict with one of his housemates, or with his girlfriend (which gets him “Locked Up” in episode 20), and even in defense of someone else. There is rarely another side shown of this cast member (that is, his intellect, his goals or his dreams). Rather, we consistently see his temper flare and his housemates respond with concern.

In the episode summary for the episode entitled “Davis vs. Tyrie” we learn: Even as they’re getting ready to head out, Tyrie clues Davis in on his inebriation alter-egos – which include the sexual Dark Kent and Leroy Jenkins, who he describes as an Incredible Hulk. Not only is Tyrie represented as an angry and violent black male, what makes Tyrie’s representation even more significant is that in this Denver season the show for the first time casts two black males in the same season. Stephen is also cast in this season and in his cast biography we learn that he is a conservative Republican and deeply religious. Bell-Jordan states: “But it is Tyrie’s conversation with a White housemate who calls Stephen a ‘White Black guy,’ that offers deeper meaning to this juxtaposition” (2008:359). The discussion between the two of using coded language including “hood” and “uppity” then leads to the fact,

That the two African American cast members seem necessarily different reinforces reductive thinking about African Americans as either “‘hood” or “‘integrated” (that is “‘acceptable” or “‘unacceptable”), and this leaves little room for more diverse and complex representations of African American males on the show (Bell-Jordan 2008: 360).

By presenting these two versions of blackness as a binary category of good and evil the complications of true racial identity are ignored and viewers are thus shown that even among Black males themselves there is such a thing as acceptable or unacceptable.

Table 1 below provides a summary of key phrases selected as descriptors taken from the cast member biographies available on mtv.com.

Table 1 Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, African American Men	
Kevin	struggling to overcome many of the issues facing African American men in 1992
David	sure to stir up some trouble with his sharp wit
Mohammed	known to be a mellow, spiritual guy
Syrus	a man in pursuit of happiness wants to be known as a good person and--more importantly--to be loved by many
Stephen	was raised by his mother in a black Muslim household but chose to follow Judaism at age 15 met his father for the first time when he was 17 an active member of a Jewish Fraternity and is majoring in business with a minor in African-American studies
Teck	is a ladies man in--what some would say--a charming way goal in life is to become an entertainer and segue into politics, where he hopes to be a positive black role model can be a party animal, Teck's alter ego proves him to be an extremely smart and responsible young man has a contagious energy and humor

Table 1, continued

David	<p>Master of his Universe. went on a colossal self-improvement binge physical prowess a superbly talented musician and a deeply entertaining person. tough exterior hides a sweet, vulnerable guy trying to run as far away as possible from the Chicago ghetto he grew up in and the legacy of his preacher father's departure from the family</p>
Theo	<p>outgoing, outspoken ladies man will do anything to get attention (especially from women) doesn't care what people think loves to party, he still keeps his priorities in order: school and church always come first move to Chicago marks his first experience living in a diverse environment, which proves to be a challenge at first</p>
Alton	<p>has a contagious energy and unerringly positive outlook on life harbors a great deal of unresolved pain due to a major family tragedy has been known to be a source of inspiration to people around him</p>
Adam	<p>grew up surrounded by the good life in Beverly Hills energy, enthusiasm and humor, along with his hunger for attention, make Adam the life of every party still struggles to find a lasting relationship with the woman of his dreams</p>
Jacquese	<p>teased in the past for somewhat resembling "Urkel" has developed a quick wit and an even quicker tongue a positive influence to all those in his life reluctantly took on the role of "man of the house" due to his absentee father</p>
Karamo	<p>an African American from Houston whose parents are from Jamaica struggles with his feelings about interracial dating as a result of his upbringing that was filled with strong anti-white prejudices works toward keeping an open mind and overcoming these fears and prejudices</p>

Table 1, continued

Nehemiah	born to a mother who is currently in rehab forced to grow up quickly and become a survivor seemingly endless challenges and disappointments a bright, charismatic young man who has the wisdom and experience of someone far beyond his years
Stephen	a charmer who flies in the face of convention a conservative Republican who is against gay marriage can be quite outspoken, but also deeply religious extremely ambitious and loves to be the center of attention will expect to be top dog at the house
Tyrie	product of a strict and aggressive upbringing searched for a safe haven, found refuge in a gang makes an effort to leave his past behind and remain focused and determined to succeed in life
Nick	a Jamaican-born ladies' man pursuing a modeling career and hopes to become a TV host a la Ryan Seacrest has a very close relationship with his family despite some unresolved issues with his father
Will	the true ladies' man of The Real World house determined to be a super-successful music producer eager to hustle and hit the streets to sell the songs he has created
Greg	first Real World roommate to be selected by viewers, who voted online for "PrettyBoy" (aka "The Chosen One") refers to people around him as "peasants" and calls women "associates" is extremely competitive when it comes to sports and academics attitude does not make him a favorite in The Real World house

Table 1, continued

Ty	<p>abandoned by his biological parents shuffled around foster homes before being adopted at age five grew up in a part of Baltimore he compares to "The Wire" despite growing up in the church, he is anti-religion and thinks believing in God is a crutch relies only on himself handsome, smart, athletic and opinionated, and he's not afraid to share his opinion. his quick temper can get him into trouble</p>
Eric	<p>a stand-up comic AND holds a job at the State Department Eric's true passion is comedy, already made significant progress in his career, performing regularly and winning several competitions known for his dreamy eyes is a handsome ladies' man has perfected the art of juggling various girls at one time</p>
Preston	<p>first childhood memory is of crying in the back seat of the car while his mother went to score crack family life was anything but ideal when he was 17, his mother essentially abandoned him, leaving Preston to fend for himself a rough childhood somehow managed to grow into a carefree individual who walks to the beat of his own drum. a proud, young, gay, black man, Preston strives to be the center of attention what he does have is a bitchy side, which he's not afraid to show</p>
Leroy	<p>was 10 years old when he and his sisters were suddenly taken away from their birth mother for her alcoholism and drug abuse. foster parents practiced 'tough love' and even used their hand to teach him a lesson has continued to keep a positive outlook toward making a better life for himself. Without a college education or a secure family learned to become entirely self-reliant credits his past experiences with making him a better man always willing to mix and mingle with new groups of people prides himself on his indescribable 'system' of picking up girls doesn't hurt that he looks like a professional athlete might on occasion pretend to be one in order to get a girl</p>

While the first season of the show serves to solidify the appearance of the “angry black male” as a stock character of the show, Season 2 argues that we can also have an “angry black female” Before the cast members have even moved into the house, the episode summary serves to inform the audience that even with gender roles reversed, the urban Black youth and rural White youth will have issues to overcome, “As they near L.A., Tami tells Jon not to expect that same adulation he receives in Kentucky for his music, in L.A. A heated conversation ensues and Jon calls Tami “trash.” The episode summary presents the interaction: “This doesn’t sit well with Tami, who is offended by the comment and complains that she feels degraded.” In viewing the scene, Dominic asks Jon about someone in his hometown starting a fan club for him. Jon in his response states he thinks the whole thing is pretty funny. Tami quickly jumps in.

Tami: You should. Just ‘cuz you have a couple of fans out in Owensboro who’ve been coming to see you two weeks, every two weeks, for the past two years doesn’t mean anything as far as the rest of the world is concerned. That boring little hick town . . .”

Jon: Aww, you just mad ‘cuz we don’t allow trash like you in our town.
(Tami laughs as Jon says this.)
Just keep . . .

Tami: They have trash like you there.

Tami: (to the confessional) I laughed it off ‘cuz it did bother me at first and then I thought about it. At first I was very sad that he would say something like that to me and then I was angry.

Tami: (back in the van): And as far as your trash comment you feel pretty funny about a subject if I would have socked your ass in the head.

Jon: If you’re brave enough to do it, then you’re brave enough to get hit right back. I mean it just really bothers me . . .

Tami: Who cares Jon? It just really bothers me. You don’t call somebody trash . . .

Jon: I didn’t call you trash.

Tami: Yes you did.

Tami: (to confessional) I dealt with Jon and his attitude for the past ten days.

Jon: (back in the van) I'm going to be a country singer whether you like it or not.

Tami: I wish you luck.

Jon: So then what are you talking about the fan club?

Tami: I didn't say anything about the fan club. So what the hell are you talking about? I didn't bring up the fan club.

Tami: (to the confessional) Dominic instigated the conversation but Dominic did not instigate calling me trash and that's the thing I'm pissed off about. That is the most degrading thing anyone can call anyone else. That . . . I mean, people think things subconsciously and it's by accident they say them. So that's probably what he's been thinking the entire trip.

(Tami starts to cry and asks if they can stop for a minute.)

(1993 Season 2 Los Angeles Episode 3).

The episode summary available on mtv.com removes the context within which Tami is called trash. Furthermore the episode summary removes the added interaction that comes from having an unseen producer interview the cast about incidents that happen.

Throughout the season Tami is repeatedly shown involved with several conflicts with various cast members and was part of two of the major plot lines for the season. Though her cast biography depicts her as beginning her day with a Buddhist chant, it is almost as if her portrayal on the show is mocking this very fact. One major plot line she was involved in is in what was later known as "the blanket incident" and the other is for her decision to have an abortion after finding out she was pregnant all while on the show. David begins, in what he feels, is in jest attempting to remove her blanket as she screams no. Despite her protests, he removes her blanket her and reveals her in her underwear. A physical struggle ensues and after a discussion with other roommates, David is removed from the show. This incident is what becomes known as "the blanket incident" serves as the last straw in David's antics on the show and the female cast members deem it unsafe if he stays (1993 Season 2 Los Angeles Episode 7). Media

critics have written about this incident because it is this incident that becomes a watershed moment for RTV. Brown explains, “Season two of *The Real World* is, arguably, the single most important season of any TV show of the last twenty years. It is one of those watershed moments that happens once or twice a generation (2010: III) though Brown argues that at the time many probably did not realize it. Brown explains in his viewing of “the blanket incident” that several aspects of the controversy were worth noting. The first is that the incident first appeared to be funny, or a joke and also adds “from where I stand, it’s pretty clear that David was trying to be funny and, maybe, a little bit flirty”. The second is that only after the cast members discussed the incident in the confessionals did everyone realize the importance of the incident, “One could almost see each cast member realizing that this made great drama as the issue built and built.” Last, that while only in its second season, the show found itself in a position where much of the conflict surrounded coincidentally black males. More importantly asking David to leave “turned out to be the single most interesting thing to happen that season. This speaks to both how dramatic the confrontation and aftermath were as well as how boring the rest of the show was”. This then becomes a template for reality television shows for years to come “long before the phrase ‘voted off the island’ become a popular idiom” (Brown 2010).

Another plot line that Tami is involved in is her decision to have an abortion which serves as a major point of contention since not all the cast members believe in access to abortion (1993 Season 2 Los Angeles Episode 11). Tami’s portrayal as an opinionated Black woman as well as a decision to have an abortion serves to reinforce

stereotypes of Black women. Jewell examines "how the mass media have systematically portrayed a cultural image of African American women, based on myths and stereotypes, that justifies the limited access that African American women have to societal resources and institutions" (1993:10). The show uses this decision to highlight the differences between everybody's beliefs and opinions about her decision. Tami's mother, herself a young mother, discusses whether or not she would have had an abortion and tells the confessional that indeed she may have considered it but it would have been the wrong decision.

In a scathing critique of RTV, Pozner (2010) states, "Reality writers, editors, and producers utilize a number of tropes to define a set of characteristics they want us to believe are *innately female*" [emphasis in original] (98). One such trope, "Women are catty, bitchy, manipulative, not to be trusted – especially by other women." In at least one season of the show, the cast biographies themselves highlight this very trope. Jasmine and Jonna, both appearing in Season 22 Cancun (2009), end up competing over the same man¹⁰. This is particularly disturbing since the two women in competition happen to be women of color: Jasmine is Black and Jonna is described as the "multi-racial beauty". In one fell swoop, the show reinforces that it is women who cannot form lasting friendships but also conveys a specific idea about beauty. Pozner argues,

Because reality TV carries these beauty myths further, and may be even more damaging, than traditional forms of media. As culturally corrosive as these images have been in previous forms of media, they become

¹⁰ This was not the only time we saw two roommates compete over the same man as this type of storyline was present in at least two other seasons. But because the focus of this dissertation is to restrict my analysis to the construction of race I did not discuss those other events though it certainly upholds Pozner's accusations that this trope is not strictly relegated to only women of color but to how women in general are often portrayed in RTV.

exponentially more dangerous when offered as “reality.” Most viewers understand to varying degrees that reality television is an edited form of entertainment. Yet we also largely accept the genre’s insistence that its cast members are “real people” who “actually believe” the cherry-picked, contextless comments we hear them make – and who “really behave” as they appear to – on these shows (2010:68).

Further we also learn about beauty from other cast members who also use their own beauty as in the case of Devyn Season 21 Brooklyn described as tease and a flirt who “has no problem juggling multiple suitors.” Shavonda Season 15 Philadelphia is also described as beautiful and as having been her high school’s first African American homecoming queen but as someone who also “loves attentions from guys”. As in the representations of Black men, it appears Black women are reduced to either being cast as “angry black females” or as hypersexualized females. Table 2 denotes below this is not the only depiction of Black women.

Table 2 Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, African American Women	
Heather	always speaks her mind regardless of the consequences. may truly be as real as it gets
Tami	begins each day with a Buddhist chant, ensuring her peace and serenity no matter how rough her day turns out
Sharon	raised in a single parent home
Cynthia	never traveled to the Southeast before, she's looking forward to leaving the inner city and exploring new cultures

Table 2, continued

Kameelah	<p>shouldn't have anything to prove to the world</p> <p>a strong-willed and opinionated young woman</p> <p>has a firm sense of self and is not afraid to tell you what she thinks</p> <p>admits she likes guys who "know when to kiss her ass"</p>
Coral	<p>straddled the worlds of privilege and poverty</p> <p>lived with her mother in government subsidized housing, while continuing an elite education funded by her father's savings</p> <p>doesn't have any qualms about speaking her mind</p> <p>Watch out, roomies...</p>
Shavonda	<p>a beautiful African American young woman who is the life of the party and loves attention from guys</p> <p>was her school's first African American homecoming queen</p> <p>struggles to support herself without any family aid and is putting herself through Grossmont Community College</p> <p>as a result of a turbulent childhood, Shavonda generally hopes for the best, but expects the worst</p>
Brianna	<p>a self-described "Philly girl"</p> <p>she tells it like it is and doesn't allow others to disrespect her</p> <p>beneath her tough exterior, she hides a very sensitive side</p> <p>led her to try out for Season 5 of American Idol</p> <p>A winner of Miss Missouri Teen and Miss America Teen pageants, this beauty queen is the epitome of a girlie-girl.</p>
Devyn	<p>may be easy on the eyes, but she's tough on anyone who stands in her way</p> <p>lives for the limelight, whether it's center stage or at the center of the club</p> <p>flirtatious behavior allows her to get what she wants without putting out</p> <p>lives by the quote: "It is easier to get into Heaven than into Devyn"</p> <p>has no problem juggling multiple suitors</p>
Jasmine	<p>has a lot to say and no problem saying it</p> <p>despite her hard edge, she wears her heart on her sleeve, leaving it in constant danger of being trampled</p> <p>has the absolute worst taste in men and always chooses unreliable players who treat her like dirt</p> <p>thrives to be the center of attention, especially if other women are around, which creates an interesting dynamic among the female roommates, especially Jonna</p>

The next group I analyze is Hispanic men. I encountered the greatest difficulty in identifying the group categorized as Hispanic. The reason I chose the term Hispanic is due to the fact that this is the term that is used to describe two Latino cast members on the current season of the show (at the time of writing), Season 25 Las Vegas. I believe that part of the reason the producers fall back on the term Hispanic is to create a panethnicity that makes it easier for the viewer to digest for those who may be unfamiliar with the group. In doing so, however, the show is at once affecting the representation by obfuscating the diversity of the group. After all the “Latino population of the United States is a highly heterogenous population that defies easy generalizations” (Suarez-Orozco and Paez 2002: 3).

This choice of label should not be overlooked as members of the cast at times self-identify as something other than Hispanic and yet still the producers choose not to include those labels as identifiers. One example occurs early in the show’s run as Pedro uses the term Latino in his discussion with Rachel as not only an identity marker but also as an indication that this would serve as their commonality in an effort to get along (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 3). A second example is from the first episode of the current season (Season 25 Las Vegas). As Naomi, described as a “Hispanic firecracker” greets her fellow roommate Nany, described as a “strikingly-beautiful Hispanic-American sweetheart”, Naomi asks Nany, “Are you Spanish?” Nany replies, “I’m Dominican and Cuban.” Naomi responds, “Oh, I’m Puerto Rican and Portuguese” (2011 Season 25 Las Vegas Episode 1). Perhaps the producers choose the term Hispanic

over Latino because of the cue they take from Pedro. In Season 3 San Francisco in an episode entitled “White Like Me” he states,

You got to one part of the United States and people are very proud of calling themselves Hispanics and then you go to another part of the United States and they’re Latino. And I had to go back, and like, ‘What is this?’ ‘What am I?’ ‘Am I Latino?’ ‘Am I Hispanic?’ And I go back and forth sometimes” (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 3).

This statement shows that even within the population itself, there is contestation over labeling. Since Pedro reveals that he goes back and forth between the labels himself, perhaps this is taken by the producers that the terms are interchangeable without a true understanding of the distinction between the two.

The term Latino generally refers to the “segment of the U.S. population that traces its descent to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds” (Suarez-Orozco and Paez 2002: 3). Still, this term “is a cultural category that has no precise racial signification. Indeed, Latinos are white, black, indigenous, and every possible combination thereof” (Ibid.). Davila also maintains that the use of the term “is to signify the ubiquitous use of this term by the media and mainstream press, which neither signals nor marks differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and other variables when making nationwide generalizations (2008:7). Still it is a group that often becomes racialized as the panethnic term is often used by many and also signifies the complexity of race and ethnic relations in the United States as this group continues to grow in size. Davila states,

That almost half of all Latinos identified themselves as white in the last census was considered a sign of their mainstreaming, just as the fact that 43 percent rejected traditional racial categories checking ‘some other

race', was taken as proof that they are at the crux of transforming the meaning of race itself (2008:2).

In his assessment of *Ugly Betty*, Avila-Saavedra argues the show “constructs a notion of U.S. –Latino identity as ‘other’ defined in opposition to non-Latinos and highlighting differences in terms of language, family relations, and other traditional values.” This is certainly true in TRW’s depiction of this group discussed below. As Avila-Saavedra states, [a]rguably non-Latino audiences are eager for representations of U.S.-Latino identity that ‘appear’ authentic while fitting within established, and reassuring, U.S. mythologies of immigration, assimilation, and success (2010:146). As such, I argue that the use of the term Hispanic in describing members of this group is to at once establish an ‘otherness’ since the term emphasizes the link to Spain (Suarez-Orozco and Paez 2002: 4) while also emphasizing a panethnic – and panracial – label that de-emphasizes a complex understanding of diversity found within the group and that presumably audiences can find relatable - a necessity since the show relies heavily on pulling future participants from current fans and viewers.

As mentioned earlier though the focus of my research is on the construction of race it is difficult to completely parse the intersection of other statuses such as sexuality. Most notably this becomes apparent in analyzing this group. First there have only been four Hispanic men cast out of the 187 total members. More significantly three of the four men cast have not only been Hispanic they have also been gay. In the cases of both Willie and JD explicit mention is made of a family that is unsupportive of their homosexual sons. Interestingly these same two men are also depicted with characteristics that may make them potentially volatile. “Willie admits that he possesses

the ‘stubborn’ family gene and isn’t afraid to be confrontational. At times, Willie insists that it’s “[his] way or the highway!” his cast bio informs us. JD’s bio ends with “when his overwhelming schedule gets to him, watch out for his fiery Latino temper.” Still of all these characters, more has been written about Pedro than any other character.

As I mentioned earlier, the co-creators of the show did extensive outreach in order to get someone cast on the show who was living with HIV or AIDS. At the time, neither the GLBT people nor individuals with HIV or AIDS were regularly accepted into mainstream life in the same way that we see it more common today. This is certainly not to suggest that any of these members face regular acceptance in today’s society but that even less was known, or responsibly represented, in the mainstream at the time Season 3 San Francisco aired (1994). In the season premiere of the show, Pedro is concerned about how he is going to reveal his status as a person living with AIDS to the rest of the cast. When he does so by showing everyone his scrapbook that is filled with newspaper articles and clippings from his work as an activist and educator, Cory asks him what the difference is between HIV and AIDS (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 1). The expectation today is many more people are familiar with the difference between the two and that this question would not be asked today.

Since part of the focus of this study has been to look at how audiences have agency over the meaning they construct from the viewing they have of certain events and for me this is most definitely the case with Pedro. My first segue into the world of challenging narratives came with my own viewing of Pedro. My parents have a habit of having CNN constantly playing in their home. Most of the time, it is just part of the

white noise in the background. On one particular day CNN was running a story about how one of the Ivy League schools had a course on TRW. In the news story a journalist interviews students enrolled in the course and the student says that she is learning a great deal from the show and the course. One of the things she notes is that since viewing Pedro she now says she “knows” someone with AIDS although she doesn’t really know him. Immediately this was cemented in my consciousness because my reading of Pedro’s character was so different. My focus on the reading of Pedro’s character was why did the producers select as their first-ever Hispanic man to appear on the show someone who was gay? For me, Pedro did not serve the function of introducing the world to a male who was living with AIDS who also happened to be gay, Pedro served the function of introducing the world to a *Hispanic* man who also happened to be a gay man living with AIDS. At the time I did not even know that I was going to be a Sociology major let alone that I would later be using this exact moment as my initial foray into what I would later know as aca-fandom or that other audience studies existed to look at just these types of phenomenon.

Pedro proved to be a compelling character for many audiences and still continues to be one of the most discussed characters of the show’s run. In his season we saw him leave his family to which he was very close. We saw him deal with interpersonal conflicts with Puck - conflicts that served as much of the storyline for the season. We saw Pedro fall in love and then later have a commitment ceremony with a Black man he met in San Francisco. Before the show finished airing, we learned that Pedro succumbed to his illness and died. According to Setoodeh, “by the time he died, on the

day after his final ‘Real World’ episode aired, he had become the public face of the disease (2009).”

Setoodeh was writing this as part of a critique of what would later become a fictional movie based on Pedro’s life that largely features his time on TRW. In fact, Season 21 Brooklyn had as part of their duties the task of providing a memorial and filming of the movie entitled simply *Pedro* (2009 Season 21 Brooklyn Episode 10). Through the film, we see that the impact of Pedro as a spokesperson for the disease. More importantly, our mass media evolution has come full-circle and now our media includes recreating live events for a fictional film. While arguably made-for-TV movies based on live events are not a new occurrence, made-for-TV movies based on reality shows are a new event. HBO will recently aired (May 2011) a film entitled *Cinema Verite*. According to HBO’s website the film,

tells the behind-the-scenes story of the groundbreaking documentary ‘An American Family’ which chronicled the lives of the Louds in the early 1970s and catapulted the Santa Barbara family to notoriety while creating a new television genre: the reality TV series.

Certainly this further complicates the issues of audiences’ construction of meaning. Many people who are now currently fans of RTV may not have even been born or were perhaps too young to remember when the original documentary was aired. Thus any understanding of the original documentary or the film has been, for lack of a better word, tainted by the views of others. There will be several people who will watch this film as I suspect is also the case for *Pedro* who will view this fictionalized account as the “true” account. Furthermore speaking of the TRW specifically there may be fans who know Pedro is an iconic character only because to date he is the only cast member to be

propelled to this type of notoriety whose story ends with an appearance on TRW. For many of today's cast members it seems that their story begins with an appearance on TRW. Table 3 below provides key phrases from the cast biographies for Hispanic men.

Table 3 Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, Hispanic Men	
Pedro	Leaving behind his family in Miami to move to San Francisco is one of the toughest things he's ever had to do As a gay man living with AIDS, Pedro has had to overcome many obstacles, but he takes them all in stride
Willie	a gay Puerto Rican American his religious parents don't accept his lifestyle which caused Willie to leave home when he was only 15. his straight twin brother are the oldest of six children who all remain close admits that he possesses the "stubborn" family gene and isn't afraid to be confrontational worked in commercials and musical theater was a regular on the children's television show <i>Ghost Writer</i> that promoted literacy for children
Jose	raised in Brooklyn, surrounded by drugs, violence and the influence of "the wrong crowd" found a way to break free from negative influences owner of multiple rental properties and the proud holder of his real estate broker license sure to take the <i>Real World</i> house by storm with his natural leadership, suave nature and love of partying
JD	raised by an abusive father unsupportive of his son's homosexuality became one of the youngest dolphin trainers in the world. mature beyond his years, which might be why he finds himself attracted to older men watch out for his fiery Latino temper

The next group under study is Hispanic women. Of all the groups to categorize this group proved to be the most challenging. At least two women I read as Hispanic but

do not ever come “out” as Hispanic throughout the show. These women are Rachel Season 16 Austin and Jenn Season 18 Denver. The decision to include them in the Hispanic category was based on looking at physical characteristics that are generally associated with Hispanic women and those are dark eyes, olive skin, and dark hair knowing full well that this can be very misleading. In addition, knowing that these women were from California I read them as Hispanic. It is my contention that the producers themselves also had trouble reading “Hispanic” and in at least one case cast a member hoping she would fulfill a different function and it was only while on the show that it was revealed that she was in fact also Hispanic. Before addressing this case, however, I want to address the lessons learned from analyzing the biographies of the Hispanic women that are clearly identified as such.

Of the 15 cast members included in the Hispanic category, 11 are women. Of these 11, there are seven direct descriptors that include the construction of a Hispanic character. In fact the decision to include the term “Hispanic” was a direct result of this vernacular that was used by the producers themselves in describing the cast members on the current season of TRW (at the time of writing – Season 25 Las Vegas). Melissa is described as “coming from a traditional Cuban family”. Elka is described as “a Mexican American beauty”. Johanna is described as “a stunning and fiery Peruvian”. Ayia depicted as being “of Mexican descent and speaking fluent Spanish” but also highlights that this will be her first extended trip to Mexico, the location of the season. Ashley is described as a “Portuguese beauty, with a hot temper and a blunt demeanor.” Nany is

described as a “strikingly beautiful, Hispanic-American sweetheart.” Lastly, Naomi is depicted as “Hispanic firecracker”.

In examining Latinos on prime-time television Rivadeneyra states, “Latinos are up to three times as likely as European Americans to be cast as lawbreakers.” Moreover, “Latino characters were also found to be the least articulate, have the heaviest accent, dress less professionally, and talk more about crime and violence than other ethnic groups” (2006:394). In many instances the portrayal of Latino/as was reduced to either being either being the lawbreakers or the law enforcers. On TRW, three cast members fulfill this narrative. Irene Season Two Los Angeles is a Deputy Marshal for Los Angeles, Rachel Season 16 Austin is an Iraq war veteran, and Nany Season 25 Las Vegas is studying to become a parole officer.

Of the depictions of Hispanic women perhaps what is even more noteworthy than that of the portrayals mentioned above is the reoccurrence of the terms that depict the stereotype of the “hot” and “spicy” Latina. U.S. popular entertainment during the 1920s through 1940s had reduced Latina stars to a particular Latina “look”, one that “projected not only exotic, inviting, and flamboyant sexuality, but also a particular social class derived from a perceived ethnicity” (Merskin 2007: 137). Over time, various stereotypical behavioral characteristics assigned to Latinas which include among others being exotically dangerous, sexual, childlike, irresponsible, mispronouncing words, speaking Spanish, and being Catholic (Merskin 2007; Mastro and Behm-Morawitz 2005; and Lott and Saxon 2002). The perception of Latinas as being exotic and sexual is certainly re-affirmed. One way this is re-affirmed is that Melissa’s bio informs the

audience that one of her past jobs has been to serve as a phone-sex operator. In Johanna we see that beauty can be used in combination with intellect “to get what she wants”. Naomi’s bio is sure to tell us how many sexual partners she has had in her lifetime. As in our Hispanic men, we are reminded that there is a temper that is associated with these characters by very nature of being Hispanic. Thus our view of Hispanics is reduced to being hot tempered, manipulative, and most likely hyper-sexualized. Still, it is this category that was the most difficult to categorize.

As I mentioned previously it was quite difficult to categorize females in this category and it seemed the producers too had a difficult time, at least in the case of Season 3’s Rachel. From her bio, there is no outwardly stated information that Rachel has been cast as a “Hispanic” cast member. In fact, from the information provided in the biography Rachel’s purpose was to serve in the capacity of one of two roles: either she would serve as the religious and political conservative who would struggle to overcome Pedro’s lifestyle, though she is described as the “rebellious Catholic girl” or she would serve as the “naïve” character since the biography ends by informing us that she is a “bad judge of character initially and sometimes trusts too easily”. Upon meeting Rachel we learn right away that above all she is quite conservative – especially in her politics. It is possible that the intended storyline for Rachel was to fulfill the narrative that either as rebellious Catholic girl or as the naïve roommate, she would grow in developing a relationship and acceptance of Pedro. In discussing this show with others no other scene or character has been as hotly debated as the reading of Rachel’s character.

In the second episode of the season, Rachel is shown attending church with Puck. Discussions in the confessional are incorporated in the scene informing us that for Rachel her Catholicism is important to her and that she intends for her future children to be raised in the Catholic tradition because for her, the Church has helped families like hers stay together. The scene then moves away to Pedro's confessional letting the audience know that of all the roommates in the house, Puck and Rachel are the only two he has experienced any friction with. As Puck and Rachel are making the sign of the cross in church, we hear Pedro's voice saying "For Rachel, her religion tells her that I am evil because I am gay." The scene then cuts to Pedro discussing this with Pam and him telling her that if this is where Rachel is coming from, their relationship can never move forward because there will always be a barrier there (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 2).

The story is being constructed in such a way that the point of conflict and tension is the issue of Pedro not only being gay but having AIDS. On the first night (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 2), Pedro shows everyone his scrapbook and in Rachel's view of the event everyone was "pc" and rather than try to seek out information about how this could affect her personally, indeed it was in her estimation a "kumbaya" moment. Pedro takes the fact that she just got up and left the room as a sign of rejection. Back in Rachel's confessional she says that although it would be ignorant to ask the questions, she is asking them. She justifies her questions because she has never lived with someone who has AIDS. Later in the same episode, Rachel tries to campaign for having the bathrooms separated by gender under the guise that because Puck is so

disgusting he is not respectful of others. Rachel is quick to tell the confessional that this was not because of Pedro but “in the back of my mind there may have been something to the fact that I’m sharing a bathroom with someone who has HIV” but is quick to point out that it was Puck’s lack of cleanliness that was of paramount importance.

In a pivotal discussion and segment that nears the end of the episode Pedro confronts Rachel about her attitude at the table with Judd and Puck on the sidelines.

Pedro: Knowing that you were Catholic and knowing that you were Republican it was, like, okay . .

Judd: (cuts in) It could be an adversarial relationship.

Pedro: Yeah, so automatically that influenced my opinion about you.

Rachel: Were you afraid that I just would not like you? Were you afraid that I might be confrontational with you? What were you afraid of?

Pedro: What I was afraid of was rejection. And the day that you sat down and five minutes later you got up and that, was to me, a form of rejection. Now, I told myself no, she . . .

Rachel: No I think you were right. You guessed right. I mean I felt uncomfortable. He’s the one with the disease. He should make me feel comfortable. And that’s selfish. But that’s how I felt.

Pedro : (in background though because the camera is not on him it could also be one of the two bystanders) It’s not only selfish, it’s wrong.

Rachel: (to confessional): I think it’s not fair of Pedro to expect me to have been comfortable. I mean he has to know that I have questions.

Pedro: Every day when I wake up and I say I am going to go and educate my community about my disease, that’s a choice I am making but it is not something I have to do.

Rachel: But I felt like we were in this together. And we all have to live together.

Pedro: Right.

Rachel: And I mean . . .

Pedro: But don’t you think that I was trying to reach out to you by . . .

Rachel: I don’t know. I felt like you were . . .

Pedro: (inaudible)

Rachel: No, I felt like you were reaching out to everybody who was already appeared to be very comfortable with it.

Pedro: You have to understand that this is scary to me. I am going to meet six people who know some of you were going to have

problems with it and to me, the whole reason I brought the book is because it made it easier for me to talk about.

Rachel: But I never asked that because I felt like that's so personal to you, I felt maybe you should come to me.

Puck: You don't have to ask how but he's just saying his door is there. If you wanna know about him, you gotta knock on the door.

Pedro: Exactly.

Rachel: But I was hurt that I fully noticed that you came across like you weren't interested in getting to know me at all.

Pedro: I didn't know that about you. You didn't know that about me, how I was feeling. We have a lot in common you know besides being both Latinos, you will understand better my relationship with my family, my attachment to my family.

Rachel: (nods her head) Very true.

Pedro: And I'm sure you felt the same way, you know. Now if you have any questions, I will be more than happy to sit down with you and answer them, and it'll be cool (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 2).

This scene has been a source of much debate and the reason why is because it is Pedro who reveals to the viewers that Rachel is also Latino. In that instant, I recall that I viewed that scene as a confirmation of my own suspicions. Because of her Catholicism and the fact she was from Arizona, my reading of Rachel was always as someone who could go either way – in terms of being or not being Hispanic. Others did not even register that this interaction took place while still others read this as not a moment of Rachel being “revealed” but rather being “outed” as Hispanic. As I mentioned earlier, one of the things I did was make my viewing of this show a social event by discussing this with other friends and it is in these discussions that this debate has occurred. In the film, *Pedro* this scene is revealed in a very different manner as will be discussed in a later section.

In and of itself the framing of Pedro and Rachel as being an issue over sexuality may be an isolated incident but the fact that in Season 5 Miami we once again see a

Hispanic woman, this time with no question about Hispanic status, in a conflict with a gay male conveys a construction of Hispanic women as intolerant of homosexuals. In this season Melissa is shown having an argument with Dan. In this argument, Melissa uses homophobic slurs (1996 Season 5 Miami Episode 12). Shortly after this conflict, Melissa leaves the show though reappears in later episodes. In Season 6 Boston, the episode summary from the first episode reveals “The extremely religious beliefs held by Catholic Elka cause some issues with other cast members, and it makes Genesis wonder if she should even tell Elka that she is a lesbian.” This fear is confirmed when in the first episode as the roommates are wondering who the gay or lesbian roommate is, Elka is relieved to learn that according to Sean it is not Montana, since they are sharing a room. Elka “is in the clear”. Later in the same episode when Genesis finally comes out to Elka, Elka tells the confessional that it was surprising to learn that Genesis was gay since she did not fulfill her stereotype of what a lesbian looked like and learning through Genesis that there was such a thing as a “lipstick” lesbian (1997 Season 6 Boston Episode 1). The culmination of these various storylines is that Hispanic women are presented on TRW as either close-minded women with an opinion, occasionally as the mother figure as in Irene and Elka who is introduced coordinating her family’s Christmas after her mother’s death (1997 Season 6 Boston Episode 1), or as exotic beings with a premium placed on beauty as in the case of Rachel Season 16 Austin (whose hero is Jenna Jameson, the porn star), Jenn, Johanna, Nany, and Naomi. Table 4 below provides key phrases from the cast biographies for Hispanic women.

Table 4 Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, Hispanic Women	
Irene	may have a tough exterior, she serves as the "mom" of the house and watches out for Jon
Rachel	an active Republican who is passionate about her politics a rebellious Catholic girl, says that she can be a bad judge of character initially and sometimes trusts too easily
Melissa	a Miami local who comes from a traditional Cuban family excited about branching out beyond her neighborhood and into a brand new circle of roommates
Elka	having grown up in what she calls a "privileged" home, admits she has been sheltered for most of her life has struggled with many real issues during her 19 years
Johanna	a stunning and fiery Peruvian living in Southern California knows that the combination of her looks and intellect can get her just about anything she wants. was born in Lima Peru and did not move to the US until she was eleven even with English as her second language, she has mastered it enough to use it as a tool to be highly opinionated and argumentative
Rachel	an Iraq War veteran she realized she had no money to pay for college and was unsure about her future, she enlisted in the US military as a combat nurse four years of the Army have taught Rachel to be tough, confident and outspoken high sex drive (Jenna Jameson is her hero) will be interesting to see if she can remain true to her man

Table 4, continued

Jenn	<p>played the typical happy roles in her life as the cheerleader, popular girl and party animal</p> <p>yearns for emotional attachment</p> <p>quest for real happiness stems from her inability to allow herself to be vulnerable, love and trust</p>
Ayiiia	<p>realworldcasting.com winner</p> <p>won a spot on the show due to her loyal friends who worked with her to win the contest</p> <p>of Mexican descent and speaks fluent Spanish,</p> <p>her first extended trip to Mexico</p> <p>definitely one to speak her mind</p> <p>sometimes it's with a viciousness that alienates the other roommates</p> <p>a reformed party girl with a history of drug abuse and cutting</p> <p>don't get on her bad side because Ayiia is the kind of person who will hold a grudge</p>
Ashley	<p>a Portuguese beauty, with a hot temper and a blunt demeanor.</p> <p>passionate and compassionate...and very opinionated</p> <p>was an Obama delegate from Vegas, and she will debate anyone, anytime about anything</p> <p>she'll be happy to tell you why she's right.</p> <p>self proclaimed "walking oxymoron" - the smart one who didn't go to college, the tomboy who wears dresses, the liberal Christian, the bitchy caregiver</p>

Table 4, continued

Nany	<p>a strikingly beautiful, Hispanic-American, sweetheart was a popular athlete and dancer for a semi -- pro hockey team throughout college</p> <p>her childhood was anything but (normal)</p> <p>father was jailed on drug charges before she was born</p> <p>hopes one day to find him, they've never even met</p> <p>with the help of her now-sober mother and supportive stepfather, looking to escape her small town life and build a better life for herself</p>
Naomi	<p>an intelligent, self-reliant woman</p> <p>doesn't seem like she quite fit into the gritty, drug-ridden town of Bronx, New York.</p> <p>Hispanic firecracker did her best to steer away from the troubled streets, but Naomi's parents weren't so successful.</p> <p>mother's irresponsibility caused Naomi to become emotionally hard and defensive</p> <p>has realized she needs to work on this and has grown to really value and cherish relationships with people.</p> <p>has successfully managed to drive her life in a new direction by graduating college</p> <p>a strong advocate for immigration and gay rights</p> <p>she's had twelve sexual partners since attending college, and doesn't regret any of them</p>

Again, as has been mentioned previously no Asian males have ever appeared on the show. In discussing the image of Asian Americans, the stereotype of the “model minority” often includes high levels of educational achievement and a well-developed work ethic. The danger in this stereotype not only lies in creating a pan-ethnic view of a group that obfuscates any diversity existing within the various groups that make up this larger group. The danger in this stereotype also lies in reaffirming that there are no structural barriers that cannot be overcome. The implication, once again, is that Black and Latino individuals who have not experienced success are a direct result of a lack of

hard work on their own part (Paek and Shah 2003). Certainly in analyzing the cast biographies this image is reinforced with such key phrases as Pam's "motivated perfectionist", Janet's description as an "ambitious 21-year old" and Ruthie's insistence on college attendance despite her foster family and in the biography's informing us that her "goal is to run her own magazine". Pam is an interesting case because there is no mention of her racial identity in her biography. What are emphasized, not only in the biography itself, but also in the depiction of her character are the long hours she puts in as a third-year medical student. She is often seen in her medical scrubs and in at least one episode the difficulty in her finding a rotation while in San Francisco is highlighted (1994 Season 3 San Francisco Episode 7). Though in the members that are cast after Pam, we see a different framing of the story.

In analyzing the show over its 25 season run, it seems that TRW has been attempting and so far at least, failing, to capture a population in our society where the narrative is framed as a conflict between generations. In Janet's biography, we learn "Like many Korean-Americans of her generation, Janet has struggled between loyalty to the traditions of her parents' culture and her own." While on the show we did often hear of a deep caring and love for her grandmother, we did not really see this big generational struggle alluded to in her biography. With the construction of Jamie's character, we learned that she was "raised by first-generation, traditional parents in San Francisco." Again though throughout this just doesn't become a major storyline or part of the conflict that we see. Even in the case of Ruthie, where there is this purposeful tension that is noted and her story is introduced as having such a rough childhood, what becomes

the noted storyline for Ruthie is her excessive drinking that forces a confrontation in the house so that she is removed to seek treatment.

Jamie is notable because she is part of TRW alumnae to have catapulted this into success. In Jamie's case, she has gone on to pursue acting and has landed several roles. Still though in at least one interview she reinforces this idea that there is some visible tension between the goals that she had and the goals that her parents have,

While her time on MTV's reality series made her recognizable, it didn't make it easier for her to get cast. 'If anything, it made it more challenging. When I would go in to audition, they wanted to make sure I was taking it seriously. Someone from a reality background would blow it off. That's the stereotype. Acting is something that I always wanted to do. I did plays in middle school, high school and college, but it was drilled into me get an education and climb the corporate ladder,' Jamie told the Boston Herald (Dehnart 2008e).

Jamie's narrative, both on the show and beyond, is key because not only is she serving as part of a group that is under-represented on the show itself but also because she now serves as part of a group that is under-represented in the media at large. By including this phrase "but it was drilled into me get an education and climb the corporate ladder" she is herself helping to conflate the myth of the "model minority" because she reinforces the stereotype that Asian families are successful because Asian families place a premium on education. Table 5 provides key phrases from the cast biographies for Asian women.

Table 5 Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, Asian Women	
Pam	claims that she has never failed at anything in her life and is an extremely motivated perfectionist
Janet	ambitious 21-year-old her parents worked long hours at their family-owned restaurant Like many Korean-Americans of her generation, Janet has struggled between loyalty to the traditions of her parents' culture and her own
Ruthie	was raised in a foster home by a strict, Filipino family According to Ruthie, her foster parents favored their biological children and discouraged Ruthie from educating herself. During high school, she enrolled in an "Upward Bound" program that boosted her self-esteem. After high school, she left her foster family and did not contact them again until she enrolled at Rutgers University
Jamie	a "tell it like it is" young woman of Korean heritage no nonsense and in your face was raised by first generation, traditional parents still finds time to party very picky when deciding who to spend her time with, but in the end overlooks some huge red flags

Now we turn our attention to analyzing bi/multi-racial cast members as described in Tables 6 and 7 below. Here what happens most frequently and, sadly, what is often the case in assessing race is that in many cases audience members read these characters as racial features of a dominant race. After reading these descriptions and learning that many of these cast members were bi- or –multi-racial, my initial reaction was to highlight the fact that MTV seemingly reduced the complex issues of identity that exist within a person who is multi-racial to an issue of hair. Brittini's (Season 20 Hollywood) biography includes the following, "Brittini grew up confused about being mixed race but recently started wearing her hair more naturally and is trying to patch things up with her estranged African-American father." How could a show that purports itself to want to

create a compelling show by highlighting differences reduce this very important issue of identity down to simply an issue of hair? But, a great deal has been written about hair.

Pozner describes what she calls “the Homogenator” – the *American Idol* style machine. She argues that female singers with non-Western features are treated as a liability and that Black, Latina, and bi-racial female contestants are often told that this is an “image” business. She maintains, “Instead, their curly, kinky, and dark hair is nearly always straightened and or/lightened” (2010:177). This issue of hair is so significant that Tyra Banks in her talk show had an entire episode dedicated to understanding “black hair”. In addition, Sesame Street recently made headlines because of a song that was included describing how wonderful “black” hair could be (www.npr.org).

Table 6

Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, Bi/Multi-Racial Men

Malik	the biracial son of a white mother and a black father. first child in his family, and the only one of his friends, to attend college obsession with music has helped establish him as a popular Bay Area club/party DJ
Josh	Puerto Rican/Italian glam rocker/rapper has dreams of making it big in the entertainment industry with his punk-funkadelic sound quintessential ladies' man

Table 7**Key Phrases from Cast Biographies, Bi/Multi-Racial Women**

Cooke	<p>daughter of a US Naval officer and a native Filipino mother</p> <p>product of a tight knit family</p> <p>has a deep connection to her mother's heritage and is the president of her school's Asian Cultural Alliance</p> <p>one day hopes to pursue pro soccer overseas</p> <p>An aggressive player both on the field and in the bedroom</p> <p>been known to be a man eater with frequent bi-curious tendencies</p>
Melissa	<p>bundle of manic wit readily admits that she doesn't get along too well with other women: "I'm really co-dependent. I need crazy, mad attention from guys."</p> <p>thrives on boy drama and conflict.</p> <p>her friends will attest, she is the funniest person they know--"a half-black, half-Filipino Chris Rock," one pal describes</p> <p>parents are the subject of some of her funniest descriptions (such as the two of them spending an evening watching scrambled porno)</p> <p>mom is a very traditional Filipino woman who actually prepares two dinners a night for her husband in case he isn't in the mood for the first selection</p> <p>eager to get out of Tampa, which she finds to be full of close-minded people</p>
Lori	<p>with a striking mixed heritage--Filipino and Irish—</p> <p>self-described drama magnet, Lori says she gets bored unless she has some kind of conflict in her life</p> <p>winner of the MTV.com Online Casting and beat out four other finalists to win a spot at the finals</p>
Nicole	<p>watched her mother suffer through a long, abusive relationship</p> <p>has managed to beat the odds</p> <p>pays \$22 a month rent for an apartment in a subsidized housing project in Atlanta.</p> <p>Although she has a mix of black and white roots, she remains proud of her African-American heritage and only dates black men</p>
Aneesa	<p>product of an interracial marriage--her father is black and her mother is Jewish</p> <p>A lesbian, Aneesa is trying to find her place in the world and strives to be different.</p> <p>is determined, focused and strong</p> <p>has the personality and confidence to rise above difficult situations</p> <p>her quick temper has earned her the reputation of being tough</p>

Table 7, continued

Keri	cool Southern girl born to a beautiful Hispanic woman decided to strike out on her own for her first two years of college and went to school in Memphis grew into an intelligent, driven, self-possessed young woman finally realized that she could remain devoted to her family while developing her own identity
Arissa	"A tough girl with a heart of gold" blessed with brains and beauty this half-black, half-Italian firecracker raised in the projects by a single learned early on how to be self-sufficient and get along wherever she goes aspirations of transcending the projects and taking on the world deeply compassionate and has been known to put the needs of others before her own
Irulan	born to a white mother and a black father struggled to process her father's death struggled briefly with body-image issues which she overcame through sheer force of will people may be initially attracted to Irulan's beauty and talent she is strong and not afraid of conflict
Christina	high-energy criminal justice graduate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas child of a biracial relationship (her mother is Korean and her father is German) drawn to diversity in her life likes to party accustomed to earning good money as a cocktail waitress
Janelle	one tough cookie. bi-racial beauty described by many as "very independent" never one to avoid confrontation was accepted to University of San Francisco School of Law and plans to study to be a lawyer keeps busy pursuing another passion: launching a career as a makeup artist will do whatever it takes to get ahead

Table 7, continued

Brittani	knows how to make an entrance, loves being the center of attention. used to getting what she wants and has no qualms about facing a confrontation head-on grew up confused about being mixed race but recently started wearing her hair more naturally and is trying to patch things up with her estranged African-American father
Jonna	the roommate with the boyfriend back home multi-racial beauty Jonna's had a rough life put into foster care and lived with a strict religious family at nine she was adopted by her caseworker who kicked her out of the house when she was 18 dreams of making people feel better about themselves by being a successful hairdresser. trying to stay focused and shake her promiscuous past, but she can't help flirting, which turns on the guys in the house and pisses off the girls but she doesn't much care

Finally, we turn our attention to what I argue illustrates TRW's attempt to capture Muslims as a population of interest. This move illustrates a case of racialization. Though the focus of this project has been to capture the racial and ethnic populations, I include this discussion because I feel it is important to provide some contextualization of how characterization on the show can occur outside of specific references to race. While religious identity has in fact been a theme throughout the show it is just one of the dimensions of diversity the producers attempt to capture in their casting. To this end, we have seen Mormons, Catholics, Jews, and at least one cast member self-described as "anti-religion". Most often religious identity or background is featured relative to either

the naiveté or conservativeness of a cast member. Some early examples of this include Julie Season 1 New York (who we are introduced to while she is attending service in the first episode) Jon Season 2 Los Angeles, Rachel Season 3 San Francisco, and Elka Season 6 Boston. More recently, we have seen this in the examples of Chet Season 21 Brooklyn and Emily Season 23 DC. It is my belief, however, that these depictions are markedly different from the most recent depictions of Muslims that show has featured.

In the season featuring Parisa (Season 19 Sydney), she is shown in a physical altercation with another cast member; a cast member who happens to be Christian. Though the producers of the show were attempting to witness religious or cultural strife, the only strife that was created was an argument over who would use the phone and when, issues not related to either culture or religion but rather to practical issues of what to do when you are sharing a home with seven other individuals. The episode summary frames the issue in such a way that while Trisha is trying to talk to her boyfriend, Parisa is attempting to talk to her family. This is not the first time Trisha and Parisa have had issues over the phone. The following is the summary of this scene as it is provided by mtv.com,

This phone booth isn't big enough for the both of us! Trisha opens the door and pokes her head inside. There, Parisa is talking away to her father over the phone. After Trisha requests to use the phone to call her parents, Parisa says she'll take it in to consideration. Outside, KellyAnne is retold the encounter with the blabbing Parisa. KellyAnne busts inside and tells Parisa to get off the phone. Finally, Parisa gets off and retreats to her bedroom. As she shouts at KellyAnne about Trisha constantly wanting the phone, but spending that time with her boyfriend and not family, the phonebooth door is heard opening. Trisha, fired up, comes speeding down the tracks, right at Parisa. She shoves Parisa to the floor.

Trisha tells her mother that she never wants to have hatred for someone. And, even though she tries to not harbor it, she loathes her roommate. Parisa has called the management of the Real World. In the house, it is against the rules to hurt anyone in a physical manner. She states that there should either be repercussions for having Trisha physical harm her, or she will go in to that phone booth and rip Trisha's face off. Unless the crew steps in, blood will be spilt.

However, what the episode summary leaves out are the references to weight and religion that are sprinkled throughout their confrontation that takes place after the shove has already occurred which are found in the transcription of the actual scene below. Indeed, Parisa is yelling at KellyAnne and indeed Trisha comes out of the phone booth.

Trisha: (on the phone) I just pushed a fat girl, dad.
 Parisa: Keep that conversation going.
 Trisha: (on the phone) The girls has problems.
 Parisa: I hope your family knows how much you love them.
 Trisha: (on the phone) Hold on.
 Parisa: That you would rather talk to your boyfriend every damn day of the week instead of your family.
 Trisha: (confronting Parisa) I'm sorry that I . . .
 Parisa: Keep it going.
 Trisha: . . . come from a classy family with respect for each other.
 Parisa: Go talk to them. They're about to get on a plane. God forbid anything happens to them. They have a wonderful daughter to come home to.
 Trisha: They have a wonderful daughter, life, house, religion, and family to come home to.
 Parisa: You're better than me in every way, Trisha.
 Trisha: I know I am.
 Parisa: Yes.
 Trisha: Hey, go work out. You've got a long way to go.
 Parisa: What about your fat ass and that disgusting gut you've gotten since you've been here.
 Trisha: (back to the phone) Hello? Alright.
 Parisa: Why don't you keep eating? Keep going.
 Parisa: (to KellyAnne) I told you from day one. She thinks she's better. Better religion. Better race. Better class. Better house.
 KellyAnne: She didn't say better, she just said they have all that to come home to.
 Parisa: (smiles) Good Christian (2007 Season 19 Sydney Episode 18).

The scene continues with Trisha's dad telling her that she should go apologize to Parisa. Trisha is insistent that to do so would be a lie. Her father insists that it is the right thing to do. Trisha agrees though admits it would not be sincere. When she comes out of the phone booth she immediately goes towards Parisa to try to apologize. Parisa is not having any of it and tells her that she has no interest in hearing anything Trisha has to say. Trisha tells her that she is just trying to be the bigger person and apologize. Parisa struggles with what to do about the conversation and the shove. As Parisa explains in her confessional, the contract they all sign is that there can be no physical aggression towards another cast member. That is the line and Trisha has crossed it. She is shown talking to her family and asking them for guidance about what she should do. As Parisa is seeking counsel from her family, Trisha is talking to the other roommates. Cohutta tells her that if Parisa decides that Trisha could stay, "her lips should be on her butt cheeks for the remainder of their time." While the other female roommates are doubtful that she would be sent home, Cohutta is consistent in reminding them that Parisa has the power in that situation. Once Parisa decides to send Trisha home, KellyAnne vows revenge and displays what can only be described as a "mean girls" sort of moment (Ibid.).

In the viewing of this season, while there are racial and cultural undertones to their fighting, what it does more than anything is solidify the trope that Pozner mentions that girls are catty and that they cannot get along. The reason they cannot get along is not because there is a deep cultural divide amongst their religions unless one counts Parisa's notes of the highly ironic and contradictory behavior of Trisha who repeatedly

claims that she is a Christian but then engaging in behavior's that would be considered un-Christian-like. In fact this conflict seemingly goes away as Isaac returns to the house. Isaac is another roommate whose grandfather dies and is out of the house during this incident. Upon his return he is happy to hear that Trisha is gone and believes that most of the roommates are as well, including KellyAnne. Still, the episode summary features Parisa's anger and ends with the phrase "blood will be spilt". This reveals a great deal of perhaps what the hope was for this conflict and by showing Trisha surprised that even an apology does not keep her from being sent home. Hence, the image is of Parisa who is the one unwilling to accept "the olive branch".

In Season 24, Sahar is constructed as a character that would also seemingly be engaging in behavior that perhaps would be considered un-Muslim-like. These behaviors are previewed in her cast member bio which informs that she grew up in a "conservative Arab community in Dearborn, MI." Further the cast member bio contrasts that though "it would be easy to assume that because of her [conservative community] she is a submissive, conservative girl." This is contrasted to what she actually is "a strong-willed, liberal Muslim who is not easily intimidated". According to her bio, though she had parents who were more permissive, she still has to hide things from her community such as that she is no longer a virgin.

There are differences in the portrayal of these two women. Parisa did not frequently announce that she was Muslim. It is only through her cast member bio that we learn she "was raised by loving but demanding Muslim parents who don't support Parisa's dream of being a singer/songwriter". While there seems to be an awareness of it

on the show, it is mostly a non-issue and does not really become problematic in nature in the house, aside from the incident described above. The big difference between these two cases is the fact that upon introducing Sahar on the show's first episode, the audience is more aware of her Muslim status going so far as to include some footage of Dearborn, where she is from though this too is a non-issue throughout the season (2010 Season 24 New Orleans Episode 1). Still, the fact that their Muslim statuses were such a focus of their bios, I believe shows the producers' attempts to try to generate drama either because each would offer a window in "Muslim" life or because their Muslim identity would serve as the foundation of conflict between the cast members. Once again, I believe the producers are directing the audience to see their status as Muslim as forming the foundation of difference but neither cast member fulfills the narrative in quite the expected manner, despite producer attempts (i.e. framing a minimal altercation and one in which Parisa does not even fight back with the text "blood will be spilled"). For this reason I think the viewers would focus on these interactions as interactions between cast members rather than Muslims and non-Muslims. Additionally, it should be noted that Tami Season 2 Los Angeles and Mohammed Season 3 San Francisco are also Muslim. While we learn about this early in their seasons, it is not highlighted throughout the season. As such it is viewed as largely unproblematic. In these cases, it is clear that Blackness was to serve as their master status. Because the casting of Parisa and Sahar occur post 9/11, this reinforces the idea that the producers are fully aware of the casting of specific demographics in both a maintenance and resistance stance vis-à-vis race. Most likely this is because the show was not engaging in what can be called

“predictive casting” where the attempt is solely to locate a population of interest and also that the show was not yet fully engaged in relying on this population to serve as the main strife for the season. In Season 3, this is most likely due to the fact that their population of interest was represented by Pedro.

Constructing Stock Characters and Themes

Over time, there are certain types of characters who are almost always included in the show and are developed after a reading of the cast member bios. Some of the stock characters that we see emerge include naïve roommate, the party guy, the roommate with the boyfriend/girlfriend back home, and the gay roommate. Other stock characters include “tough” black girl, angry black man, anti-angry black man, lone gay character with a heart, no more nice gay, typical guy, at-a-crossroads female, the conservative, the drama queen, the party guy, the guy with a troubled past, religious conservative, angry “ethnic” girl, girl with body issues, southern belle, southern gentleman, and southern boy. In examining things related to race and ethnicity, the mere introduction of these characters highlights the complexity of trying to create finite labels and boundaries for this categorization. In discussing the naïve roommate for example often this is portrayed simply as a black versus white issue but not exclusively. Again because the focus of this project is to look at the construction of race and race and ethnic relations, I will not analyze every single stock character. What these stock characters do show is how often some of the basic roles that the roommates play fulfill some of the larger narratives of the show as will be discussed in the next section. Additionally as the show progresses, and as the show pulls participants from its fan base, the cast members

themselves pull into their own depiction preconceived notions of how the show operates as is evidenced by some of the interactions described below.

In analyzing several of the basic roles that the roommates serve it is important to keep in mind that these roles are constructed by the producers and presented in the cast bios. As the show progresses the type of character or role also progresses. For example, “lone gay character with a heart” later evolves into “no more Mr. or Ms. nice gay”. The actual descriptors used for Norman Season 1 New York and Beth Season 2 Los Angeles include such descriptors as “Norm adds a lot of humor and heart to the show” and “a soft-spoken gal” for Beth. Later, Tyler is described “manipulative”, “mischievous”, and with a “wry smile.” His biography also includes, “With Tyler, who is openly gay, it can be difficult to tell the difference between sarcasm and seriousness-but that’s half the fun.” Throughout his season he is often depicted as just that – an individual who can be blunt and cutting with his word selections.

As the show progresses, the cast members themselves become quite aware of the various roles the cast is expected to play. This highlights the awareness with each season that passes, the participants are even more away of the formulaic roles that are often highlighted in the show. As such, they are complicit in the various portrayals we see. “In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act” (Bakhtin 1997: 250). He continues: “its participants *live* in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is they live a *carnivalistic life*” (1997:250). Because this type of life is life drawn out of its ordinary routines, “it is to some extent ‘life turned inside out’, the reverse side of the world” (1997:251). In this life, further,

laws that are enforced and enacted upon in noncarnival life are suspended in carnival. This dynamic comes into play as seasons of TRW begin their evolution into formulaic patterns. One of the first questions, for example, the roommates begin asking each other upon meeting refers to determining what everyone's race is and also to establish sexual orientation. Casting a "gay" participant comes to be so expected, that a cast member can expect to be confronted with this issue during initial meetings. Further, many cast members maintain that they have done things on the show that they would never have done in their "real" life.

One example of where the cast members exhibit this process is in the first episode of Season 22 Cancun. Customarily, two roommates are introduced prior to their arrival to the home they will be sharing for the next several months. Ayia and Bronne are paired in this season. As they are making their introductions and making small talk, Ayia asks Bronne whether he has a girlfriend. Bronne is quick to reply that he does not have a girlfriend or a boyfriend and states "I'm straight by the way." Ayia's laughter which ends the scene serves to communicate to the audience that alas the lone gay character that is typically cast is not Bronne. Upon arriving at the lunch where they will be meeting their other roommates, Ayia sits at the table and asks: "One question: who is straight?" Other roommates are overheard in the background asking, "Oh yeah, who is the gay one?" Once the gay roommate is revealed, Jonna is quick to add "He is the best gay guy ever!" Specifically dealing with issues of race, later in the same episode the roommates meet over lunch and decide that since the gay question has already been asked, it is now time to ask what everyone is "ethnicity-wise". Emily, who asks the

question, decides that they go around and say their race and ethnicity but decides to start with Ayia. As an individual who often gets asked, “so, what exactly are you?”, I interpret this behavior as the inability to neatly classify Ayia into a specific race and ethnicity. Ayia responds by stating “Mexican”. Emily then states she is “quarter-black, Irish, and Danish.” The roommates are surprised that she is a quarter-black to which Emily responds by nodding and repeating “quarter-black, I’m adopted.”¹¹ Once her adopted status is revealed, we also learn that two other roommates were adopted and the discussion of race-ethnicity ends (2009 Season 22 Cancun Episode 1). What this interaction does highlight is despite assertions to the contrary, race continues to be of primary importance in this society. Additionally, despite claims of race-neutrality or color-blindness, it is still something the roommates must clear up before continuing. Lastly, it is the identification of the racial-ethnic minority cast members that are highlighted on the show. In other words, we do not learn about the background of any of the white cast members, seemingly because it is not information necessary for the audience. This is not true, however, in the case of racial and ethnic minorities where revealing identity becomes critical in our understanding of their portrayal and representation at least as far as the editing process leads us to believe.

While the focus of this study is to capture the portrayals of racial and ethnic minorities and the various relations created among various cast members many of these patterns overlap. In many cases it becomes quite difficult to fully separate out just one

¹¹ This is the cast member that I discussed in a previous footnote, number nine, who had not been read as quarter-Black. Her bio makes no reference to her race and is described as a “sensitive girl” who is the “daughter of therapists”. As mentioned in the previous footnote she was included and counted as white. This, helping to illustrate the nature of race as a social construction.

category, theme, or pattern. One example of a theme that begins without a focus on anything necessarily racial but ends with racial overtones is the theme of education and how education is portrayed and used by both producers and characters.

Over the seasons education becomes a descriptor that changes greatly. While the program purports to capture young people at a particular point in their lives, the show eventually evolved into depicting almost exclusively college educated or college enrolled students within a narrow age group of 18-25. The height of this is Season 7 Seattle where every cast member was enrolled in college and the median age was 21 years old. However with the Paris season, each cast member is depicted with a specific dynamic in terms of their own education almost as if there is an opposition to it. The cast is reduced to simply a group that prefers “partying” rather than as seeking education for the purposes of educating themselves. Ace is described as a sixth year college student and is portrayed as a business owner who enjoys the lifestyle that accompanies owning several bars. Adam is described as having a degree in communications from Stanford yet is also described as being an aspiring lyricist. Christina is described as someone who enjoyed the Vegas nightlife so much that she stayed behind as her family moved away from the scene. In addition, while Christina has a degree in criminal justice, the bio describes her enjoyment of making “good money” as a cocktail waitress. Mallory is a 19 year old student on a soccer scholarship though the network describes her as longing to break free from the structured life of athletics. While Simon is described as having a desire to attend college, he is also described as having yet to do so. C.T. is the only character of the season described in a way that does not make him

appear as if he is pursuing a goal away from education though he too is also described as working full-time as a bartender.

Perhaps the most notable changes in terms of how education fits into the type of character we are likely to have seen on the show revolves around the pursuit of other paths and the fact that we are now beginning to see characters who are simply choosing not to attend college at all not because their educational attainment or pursuit is simply absent from the storyline or minimized but because the characters are adamant that they have simply chosen a different path. However in doing so, the show is highlighting that a lack of education, read as college education, serves to create a divide in terms of not only who can interact with whom but in terms of *how* we interact with each other. This theme is presented with two characters from the most recent seasons: Ryan Season 24 New Orleans and Leroy Season 25 Las Vegas. Prior seasons have included a character that may not necessarily have gone to college. For example, Emily Season 22 Cancun when asked the question about whether or not she has graduated from college replies: “I’m not in college. I work at Hooters.” Later in the same episode, she and another roommate are having a discussion over her job. Joey is shown speaking to the confessional stating: “Emily this is ridiculous. You’re a *waitress*. Get over yourself.” Emily is then shown stating to the confessional: “It’s hurting my feelings that he is making it out to be a joke (referring to her job). Don’t make me feel dumb for working at Hooters” (2009 Season 22 Cancun Episode 1). While her occupational choice is a point of conflict in the first episode, the rest of the episodes do not highlight her lack of college education.

However, in seasons 24 and 25 the seasons have showcased that these cast members specifically chose not to attend college. Ryan instead chose to become a hairstylist and regularly describes himself as a successful hairstylist and at times refers to himself as even a hairstylist to the stars. What is significant about Ryan is that much of Ryan's storyline involves his difficulties in getting along socially with his roommates. In fact, Ryan chooses to leave the show before the roommates can ask him to leave due to him being so socially inept that the rest of the cast is simply unable to communicate with him. In the specific episode where the roommates are pushed too far, Ryan is visited by his brother and cousin. The three are depicted as highly childish and juvenile (2010 Season 24 New Orleans Episode 10).

His inability to get along with one cast member, Preston - a Black gay male, serves as the driving storyline and conflict for much of the season. These conflicts end often with Ryan highlighting his success. Though these conflicts involved various issues including race, class, and sexuality, the focus on success serves to convey to the audience that not only is there a racial divide there is also a class divide. By speaking in terms of "different" life experiences the audience is absolved of confronting this inability of the two to be able to get along from a structural standpoint. Rather, uneducated individuals are incapable of fulfilling TRW's narrative that all intergroup issues can be resolved with compassion and understanding on behalf of individuals because only willing individuals are capable of such growth. As such, Ryan is summarily dismissed from the show – though of course this was his own choice.

More recently Leroy was cast and introduced on Season 25 Las Vegas while on his route as a garbage collector in his hometown of Dallas. On more than one episode, Leroy is talking to the confessional and explaining that he just doesn't understand many of the words that Mike uses. In one principally important scene, Mike is discussing solar flares and theories of how solar flares may soon affect our ability to harness electricity. The three non-white characters of the season, Nany, Leroy, and Naomi, are depicted as sitting and listening to Mike as he is talking though clearly not understanding such advanced verbiage as "cataclysmic" and "polarity." To further reinforce this not-so-subtle depiction the producers edit in Naomi speaking in the confessional about the need to have a thesaurus at hand when talking with Mike and that at times the words Mike uses are so advanced that she believes it is better to simply smile and nod as opposed to looking stupid (2011 Las Vegas Season 25 Episode 2).

This very short scene illustrates how potentially powerful such subtlety can be. In one simple scene the notion that intelligence is different across racial and ethnic groups is reinforced. While the scene on its own may not be enough to introduce the idea into someone's paradigm, someone who watches this scene who already has this stereotype has just had their stereotype reinforced. The fact that producers are adamant that the storyline is driven by participants and crafted after months and months of filming everything that happens makes such a scene that much more important. Out of the thousands of hours of interactions the producers filmed, this scene was considered important enough to be presented to viewers. Whether the intention was to create a comical moment or whether the intention was to advance a specific agenda is not

relevant necessarily here. What is relevant is the effect that such a scene has on its viewing audience.

A second character or theme that may not explicitly read as being racial in nature specifically is the character of the Southern Belle. My contention here is that most fans do not associate the term Southern Belle with the specific historical context within which it originated and rather use the term to highlight a different way of viewing the world attributed to nothing more than regional differences. There are four characters whom in their cast biographies have the actual phrase “Southern Belle”. These cast members are: Genesis Season 6 Boston, Cameran Season 14 San Diego, Brooke Season 18 Denver, and Kimberly Season 20 Hollywood. In analyzing the cast biographies we learn that a genuine Southern Belle is beautiful, polite, and charming. We learn that she may possess a “charming Southern drawl”. We also learn that having both Southern Belle charm and naivete can get you “sometimes perceived as a ditzzy blonde.” More importantly from these same cast biographies we also learn what a Southern Belle is not. We learn that if one possesses beauty, then one cannot also be warm, friendly, and down to earth. After all, what would explain why people are so shocked to learn that is not only stunningly beautiful she also possesses these qualities? In Genesis’s biography, the biography informs us that she appears to be a genuine Southern Belle. Once we find out that she can speak her mind, is extremely liberal, or has a girlfriend, then we know she cannot possibly be a genuine Southern Belle. Further, from Brooke’s cast biography we learn that not only is she an extremely sexual person she was also in a long-term interracial relationship. Since the biography is sure to let us know that Brook is not our

typical Southern Belle, one can only surmise that a true Southern Belle would be neither sexual or in an interracial relationship. In their study of *The Matrix*, King and Leonard argue: “As will all forms of popular culture, it employs racialized ideas and lenses, at the same , [. . .] it denies the existence and importance of race through a discourse of color blindness” (2004:35-6). This type of discourse is as Moore claims, “. . . is asserted to be racially neutral, allows whites to disavow racism and racial animus while simultaneously engaging in racial ideologies and practices that support and maintain white privilege” (2008:137). This construct of the Southern Belle character demonstrates how the show at once attempts the dualism of using “diversity” for the purposes of dramatic tension, in this case a term wrought with historical context, but still denying the complexity of employing the term.

While these stock characters and cast constructions have mentioned some implications for intergroup relations we now turn our attention to what the show communicates concerning racial and ethnic relations.

Communicating the Template for Racial and Ethnic Relations

In analyzing how TRW frames racial and ethnic inter-group relations was a major concern for this project. Because of the sheer volume of characters and potential interactions between them I instead focused on the patterns that emerged and illustrate these patterns with some of the more memorable interactions. Taken individually, each may not amount to a prescriptive for how individuals of different groups should interact but taking the sum of all of these interactions together we see a very definite pattern in

how members of racial and ethnic members should interact. Above all, the narrative is that differences can be overcome through communication and understanding.

As I previously mentioned, Season 1 of TRW established the prototype for racial and ethnic conflict portrayed on the show. Much of the conflict portrayed in the early seasons of the show involves conflict between a black cast member and a white cast member. Black men were framed as angry and aggressive. Black women were framed as being judgmental and opinionated. Later in the show's run, we continue to see this pattern. Typically some of the most commonly discussed incidents on the show usually involve Kevin and Julie from Season 1 New York and David and Tami from Season 2 Los Angeles (most likely since this results in David's eviction from the house), and Stephen and Irene from Season 7 Seattle.

Stephen and Irene's altercation highlights an important change in the show. This was the first time we witnessed the actual physical contact that was made between the two cast members (1998 Season 7 Seattle Episode 15). In Season 1, white cast member Julie does state that there is a candlestick that was thrown by Kevin but the audience doesn't see this action. What we see is later, in attempting to work through their differences, Kevin is giving an impassioned speech and we do see him physically domineering over Julie who keeps getting more and more uncomfortable with the public scene of the confrontation as well as the fact that he keeps getting closer to her (1992 Season 1 New York Episode 11). In Season 2, while we see Tami getting upset and yelling at David who is attempting to pull the blanket off of her in the instant there is some laughter on behalf of both Tami and David, who are both Black. As Beth (who is

white) starts to get involved with the altercation, David appears to still believe that he is just joking and being playful (1993 Season 2 Los Angeles Episode 7). In the case of Stephen and Irene, it is clear that Stephen is upset at Irene's accusations and we see him slap her. In this example, we once again see a Black male pitted against a white female. More importantly the aftermath of this event, while on the show, results in a, perhaps unintentional, condoning of physical violence that in many later episodes reaches quite uncomfortable levels. In my viewing of the series, this is a pivotal moment of the show's history because the conflict sparked such controversy, conflict, and ratings that confrontations in later episodes of the series make this seem trivial by comparison.

While on the show Irene is revealed to suffer from Lyme's disease. She begins to have a difficult time interacting with the other cast members and decides to leave the show. As she is leaving the house, she calls Stephen over to let him know that she has left last words for everyone and she wants to give him his last words. Her last words to him are about the fact that a marriage between the two would never work because he is gay. In this season there is no cast member who is gay so at many times, the roommates are trying to figure out which one among them is the gay character. A running theme was that Stephen was the gay character who just didn't know he was gay yet. This proved to be too much for Stephen and at this time he gets really upset. As Irene is being driven away out of his frustration he runs up the pier, opens the door, and slaps her (1998 Season 7 Seattle Episode 15).

Since the show reportedly has a clause that there can be no physical violence between cast members or if cast members feel unsafe with a roommate, the roommate

must leave. The cast must then decide whether or not to allow Stephen to stay on the show. The cast members have wildly different reactions to the incident. David and Nathan, the white male cast members of the season, both express angrily, and ironically, how awful it is for a man to ever lay a finger on a woman regardless of what she may have done to instigate. The producers step in to show the cast members what was filmed in order that they may better make their decision. In the end, Stephen is allowed to stay in the house provided he attend anger management classes. Irene is shown being interviewed in her home upset at the roommates decision to let him stay because they were not the ones who felt how much that slap hurt or stung (1998 Season 7 Seattle Episode 16).

Again what is notable about this season is that this is the first time we see any sort of physical altercation while being awarded the opportunity to stay on the show. This pattern repeats in later seasons. In Season 18 Denver, we see Tyrie and Davis get in an altercation and while Tyrie is not the individual who instigated the fight, it is framed and previewed with Tyrie being the one who ends in handcuffs (2006 Season 18 Denver Episode 4). In Season 23 DC, Ty is shown pushing Andrew off the balcony resulting in Andrew being taken to the emergency room (2010 Season 23 DC Episode 10). Once again, we see Black pitted against white. Yet, in each case the participants remain on the show. Though there are exceptions as in the case of Trisha Season 19 Sydney. Arguably, the show is illustrating that perhaps there is a gendered distinction to be made in terms of who is allowed to remain on the show and who is asked to leave when it comes to physical altercations with other cast members.

In the current season, Season 25 Las Vegas, the story in the first few episodes has involved white male Adam getting so drunk that he becomes physically aggressive and repeatedly breaks things as people are attempting to pull him out of the bar and into his room. In truth, the only thing Adam has been doing is grabbing whatever item is available, usually a glass or a bottle, and then smashing the object into pieces. Leroy, a Black male, has attempted more than once to talk to Adam about his behavior because Leroy does not appreciate the behavior nor does he appreciate that Adam is creating a mess that everyone else must clean up. In the previews, Leroy has decided that since talking to him is not working he must find another way to make Adam realize his behavior is ridiculous. Leroy then resorts to modeling Adam's behavior. However, in the previews what we see is imagery of an angry Leroy smashing objects in the house, the roommates getting fearful as they do not understand what is happening, and Leroy stating to the confessional that the house now has another "psycho" (2011 Season 25 Las Vegas Episode 5). Again in the previews for the upcoming season as well as upcoming episodes, the incident is set up within the context of confrontation, altercation, and then sirens, in the cases of DC and Denver, when in actuality the events are more complex than this. The image that is left behind is that of the black male as aggressor. If this is the dramatic pull that is necessary to excite viewers to upcoming shows and if this is what brings them back, then what it is showing repeatedly is the audience's ready acceptance of the black male as aggressor. Further, in the most current season of the show Adam is asked to leave by the hotel staff rather than by the show's producers which I believe speaks to a significant change in the show. The producers were willing

to allow Adam to stay after repeated outbursts of drunkenness and destruction of property. My prediction is that if producers were questioned about this fact, they would say that it was their stance of non-interference since indeed the roommates have a short discussion about whether Adam should leave. Interestingly in previous seasons if just one cast member said that s/he wanted another cast member to leave, the cast member left as in the case described above where Trisha is asked to leave the show after shoving Muslim woman Parisa. Here, however, Leroy's pleas and desire to have Adam removed from the show were ignored, at least until hotel security decided he had done too much to the penthouse in which they were staying after having already been warned (2011 Season 25 Las Vegas Episode 6). In the reunion episode of this season, when it seems the rest of the roommates are angry at Adam, Leroy asks why they did not band with him in his efforts to get him removed (2011 Season 25 Las Vegas Reunion Special). Alas, no one has an answer for him nor does the host follow-up on this question.

Even when there are no physical altercations, we see a dynamic of Black females also as aggressors though not always necessarily physical. Though, we see some of this as well. Aneesa Season 11 Chicago is repeatedly shown in angry confrontations and physically going after her ex-girlfriend as well as other girls that come into the house. In Season 6 Boston, the first season to feature two African Americans in the same season, much of the conflict involves Kameelah. Kameelah is presented as a strong woman who likes to get her way.

In Season 10 Back to New York I argue that in an effort to maximize the race issues of the first time the show had been in New York the show casts multiple

roommates who were biracial, Malik and Nicole. The result was that a coalition seemed to brew between Coral, a black female, and Nicole, a bi-racial female who “remains proud of her African-American heritage and dates only black men” according to her cast biography. This statement is what Bonilla-Silva discusses as racial projection (2006:101). He states, “Whites freely lash out at minorities [. . .] and seldom exhibit self-reflexivity: minorities are the problem, whites are not” (Ibid). In this case, it is Nicole who has a problem with race since she only dates black men. Additionally, she reinforces the idea that the naturalization of self-segregation is just that: both natural and self-imposed. In this season Coral and Nicole are repeatedly shown ganging up on the other roommates in the house, especially Mike and Malik though they had fairly isolated themselves from the rest of the house as is evidenced by the following from an episode summary from this season,

As the roommates lounge by the pool, a mysterious white van pulls up, and out jumps the six Road Rulers. Everyone is stoked to have some new friends to hang with for the week, particularly the guys. Well, everyone but Coral and Nicole. They couldn't care less about the Road Rulers as they continue snubbing everyone around them.

With Coral and Mike once again we see the repeated dynamic of the black urban cast member in conflict with the naïve, often rural, white cast member though this had evolved to Parma, Ohio in what is described as a “predominantly white middle-class suburb of Cleveland” in this season. However with the conflict between Nicole and Malik we see the added dynamic of the “you’re not black enough” to call yourself black. In the end, the narrative that was fulfilled was between Coral and Mike who, once again, through one-on-one communication were able to get past their differences and reach

shared understanding. Mike learned that he was in fact make comments deemed racist and Coral learned that she needed to make concessions to Mike who simply did not know any better. Fundamentally, the show conveys that it is the minority who is indeed the problem.

Readings of the Show

As I mentioned previously, though I treat this work as participant observation and have positioned myself as a fan of both RTV and TRW, I did not feel it was sufficient to rely on my own viewing of this show for this work. In this section, I include various readings of the show to give a preliminary account of viewer interpretations of the show. One such account is a brief segment on a clip show on MTV's sister station, VH1. The show, *I Love the 90s: 1992* featured memorable pop culture icons and includes commentary by various others including comedians, television stars, and other well known people in the entertainment industry. This particular episode features several actors and comedians reciting the well known introduction for the show. Included amongst the actors and comedians are two cast members of the first season, Eric and Kevin. As the various people are discussing the show, actress Beth Littleford notes that the show starts out "a little formulaic in casting". The show then cuts to a comedian who explains the casting, "You have the hick girl with a real bad accent." As he is mocking her accent, a photo of Julie is flashed on the screen and a clip of her asking, "Do you sell drugs? Why do you have a beeper?" is aired. The clip then cuts to another comedian who then states, "homosexual guy" as a photo is shown of Norm. The clip then cuts to another actress who says, "a woman who is very

controlling” as a clip of Heather B. is shown as she is yelling at Julie. The montage then clips to another actor saying, “you have the hunky guy” as a clip of Eric airs. The same comedian who mentions the homosexual now mentions “the one guy that doesn’t talk to anybody” as a clip of Andre plays. The same actress who points out the controlling female also points out that there is a “righteous Gloria Steinem sort of person” as a clip of Becky plays.

In this clip, Kevin also tells us his view of the role he played on the show, “I was the angry Negro on *The Real World*.” Then a montage of him confronting various cast members of the show is aired. A comedian then tells us that “it was just fun to watch these people fight.” A clip of Eric talking to the confessional airs, “Julie was really upset.” A clip of Julie crying is shown. A comedian then mocks her tears and informs that it was then the gay guy’s job to come and comfort the crying girl. The clip ends by highlighting some of the changes between then and now and shows the flirtation between Eric and Julie. This flirtation was a feature of the first season and the clip notes that at this point what the producers and cast members were showing was just the flirtation. This is a far cry from the sex-filled scenes of more contemporary seasons. An actress serving as commentator observes, “This show has gotten progressively juicier and every season there’s someone that just busts out with their alcoholism, is a complete whore, someone is crying, someone is barfing. It’s just fantastic! It’s the best reality show on television.”

In this less than two minute segment, the show is reduced to highlighting some of the stock characters I have mentioned previously and with the evolution, or perhaps de-

evolution of the show, over the seasons. Further, what it does confirm is that indeed I am not the only fan who has taken from the show the fact that Black females and males are depicted as angry. This fact is further complicated when it is Kevin himself, the original “Angry Black man,” confirming to audiences indeed the role that he played is the role we perceived.

Viewing “Pedro” as a Viewing of TRW

No other reading perhaps is as significant as the film based on Pedro Zamora’s story, simply entitled, *Pedro*. Pedro is perhaps the most well-known cast member from TRW. I mentioned previously, he is so well known that in 2009 a film was made about his life and aired on MTV. What is fascinating about this film is that it represents Pedro, as well as the show itself, in a very different light than the original season that featured him did. In fact it shows the producers asking “Peter” if he would not mind changing his name to “Pedro” while on the show. It also portrays Rachel as not at all ambiguously Latina as evidenced by blue eye shadow and red lipstick. As Guzmán and Valdivia note, a trope surrounding the signification of Latinas in U.S. popular culture is that of tropicalism where Latinas are characterized by among other aspects “bright colors”, “red-colored lips”, and “long Brunette hair” (2004: 211). In fact, according to the film, their introduction is in Spanish, another way in which Latinidad is communicated (Guzmán and Valdivia 2004:215). . Further it also illustrates the fact that Pedro purposely and knowingly goes on the show to serve as an educator. In fact, according to the film, the Puck and Pedro conflict and showdown have little to do with his grotesque hygiene habits but rather are about the fact that as Puck receives all of the attention,

Pedro cannot fulfill his mission. He is insistent on staying so on message that at times Judd has to tell him that the cameras are not around. Also, the scene I mentioned previously (pages 125-6) between Rachel and Pedro is shown interrupted several times by such things as needing to reload film into the cameras. The scrapbook that Pedro uses to share his story with his roommates is depicted in the film as so large it is at once both comical and almost farcical. My memory of said scrapbook was of an average sized photo album. Though when reviewing that episode after having viewed the film, it seems my memory was mistaken and indeed the scrapbook was larger than average sized.

Still what this film does is portray a viewing of the character that is at once both a prop for the producers of the show and a master of the construction of his/her own character depiction. The film also reinforces the narrative that all it takes to overcome any issues of difference is individual understanding. In the film, Pedro's family is shown to be cold and intolerant of both Sean and Sean and Pedro's relationship. That is until they view the episode where they get married. In that instant, with tears in his father's eyes, Pedro's family realizes that there is a love shared between the two that makes Pedro happy, which is more important than anything else. For the many viewers who were not around to witness the original, this is perhaps the only view they have of Pedro and this season. In addition, the film relies so heavily on almost verbatim discussions that it puzzles me why they were so detailed to recreate certain events and yet include how much of the show is affected by the cameras and crew. This can also

further confuse viewers of the film and portrays quite an interesting view of both the show and the cast members as well.

Tyrie Versus Davis

Above I highlighted the fight between Tyrie and Davis as analyzed from the point of view of academic (Bell-Jordan 2008). Here, I offer what I would consider a fan perspective since Andy Dehnart claims to be a fan of RTV. This fight is largely over the use of the “n-word” and in the altercation the use of the word that began the entire fight in the first place is used by white cast member Davis. Dehnart states “But it [the fight] was also horrifying because the entire thing happened because both of them were drunk out of their minds, and because everything received a neat, clean resolution once they sobered up, as if blind drunkenness is an acceptable excuse for fighting or racism” (2006c). The issue of whether or not production should be involved is addressed by Murray, co-creator and producer, who is cited as stating,

However, he said that they don’t like to stand in and be ineffective, pretend bodyguards. Instead, he says, ‘our goal is to let these seven young people work out their own issues, to not be ‘Mom’ and ‘Dad’ and step in all the time, because the whole idea of the show is that this age group does make mistakes, and we have sort of a faith in them that they will learn from it and ultimately do the right thing’ (Dehnart 2006d).

Again, the emphasis is on letting individuals work out issues themselves. Specifically of the Tyrie and Davis argument, he is cited as stating,

Of Davis and Tyrie’s confrontation, he says that ‘never has there been a clearer example of how miscommunication happens when people are inebriated, because this did not have to happen. If the people hadn’t been so drunk, if they’d been listening to each other. If they’d been communicating better, it would’ve all been resolved very easily.’

Finally, Murray says that, after the events of this episode, “it was pretty exciting to see that they were able to try to put this behind them and try to move forward. It would be nice if the rest of the world could be so quick to try and forgive ‘(Ibid.).

Here explicitly stated is part of overarching theme of the show that issues of race can simply be issues of miscommunication, ignoring the fact an individual’s decision to utilize such a loaded term even, or perhaps especially, while drunk reveals complex and deeply imbedded issues of race relations in society. Further, that issues of race are simply issues that need be forgiven. Thus, the producer himself is employing one of the frames discussed by Bonilla-Silva, the minimization of race (2006:72).

Participant Responses as Viewings of the Show

As I argued earlier, part of the dynamics of RTV involves the continued media presence that exists long after the season’s run. Here I use examples to illustrate this phenomenon and the various ways it can happen. Each of these cases illustrate above all else the contested representations. While many, many more examples exist it is beyond the scope of this work to include all the myriad ways in which participants have extended portrayals beyond the show.

The most common type of media presence for TRW participants is through returning for the various *Challenges* where they compete for cash and prizes. Beth Season 2 Los Angeles is one of the cast members who has had a great deal of involvement with the network through appearances on this series and as a result discusses the show through her own MySpace blog, “Meanwhile, eliminated cast member Beth Stolarczyk has been posting to her MySpace blog about the game. Love her or hate her, her posts are thoroughly entertaining deconstructions of the production,

her fellow cast members, and her own performance” (Dehnart 2008a). Still, despite her connection to the show, she is cited as saying that the show has lost its former glory,

Los Angeles’ Beth, never one to disappoint with her commentary, said what we’re all thinking about the show’s progression. ‘I personally feel that it’s kind of gone downhill, because before you kind of like dealt with like social issues, where people could identify with people, and that’s why people enjoyed watching it, and now I feel like it’s all about getting drunk and sex. What are they going to do next season Are they going to have, you know, eight people having sex at one time? I think it’s pretty trashy now,’ she said (2008b).

This case demonstrates the use of the internet to have a continued media presence as well as the involvement with the show that the spinoffs create for participants. Sean Duffy Season 6 Boston and Rachel Campos Season 3 San Francisco have recently also had to answer for their appearances on the show due to Sean’s successful run for Congress. A newspaper article describes Sean being both a celebrity candidate and others who do not know him, “Others are just catching wind of the tree-climbing 38-year-old’s nightclubbing, woman-chasing antics on the 1997 Boston season of “The Real World.” There’s a video of Duffy on YouTube dancing on a pool table in boxer shorts while drinking beer” (Thompson 2010). At a campaign event he is cited as saying, “I was young. They edit in things. I didn’t have any kids yet. If you want to know my character, look at the kids I’ve raised. All I can do is tell you this is what I’ve done. This is where I’ve been. This is where I stand” (2010e). While acknowledging that the show played an important role in his life, after all it was responsible for bringing him together with his (as described by the article) “conservative Latina wife”, the article highlights that it also showed him in a light that his opponent is trying to benefit from. Still, the

show has had an overall positive effect, “Yet, the complications of a life lived in “reality” television has had more pluses than minuses for the aspiring congressman. Duffy was cast on MTV as the handsome Midwestern conservative in a diverse household of young adults. The partying came with the territory” (Thompson 2010). This case illustrates the synergistic relationship between participants, viewers, and producers. Producers can blame kids being kids for entertaining antics, participants can blame editing for showing those antics, and viewers can attribute those antics to youth. Meanwhile, the show earns greater buzz since it can serve as a stepping stone and the participants can use the show to send a message.

Despite this possibility, some of the most common types of narratives that exist are those that claim that through editing the show presented falsehoods either about individuals or storylines. Two notable critics of the show are Irene Season 7 Seattle and Melissa Season 9 New Orleans. A newspaper article about Melissa Beck (née Howard) cites her as saying that MTV’s depiction of her, like that of many former cast members, is one-sided. Further, “You will never hear me say anything intelligent. No one cares that I am a graduate with a journalism degree, that I minored in Black Studies, that I made straight A’s (or) that I have worked every day of my life since I was 15” (Deggans and Peraud 2000). Though Melissa has frequently been very vocal in her criticism of the show and has been open about the fact that she was promised that her discussion of her father as an alcoholic would not be shown. The producers claim that participants know that there will be no privacy when they go on the air. This claim is disputed by Irene who maintains that the producers knew that Stephen was gay and that he was picked

because he was openly gay, black, and Jewish. However once he was in the house, he wanted to keep the fact that he was gay hidden. When Irene complained to the producers about helping to hide this fact, they threatened to make her look bad (Dehnart 2002a).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this work, I have shown that RTV complicates the traditional view of media as a one-way process. Using TRW as an exemplar of the genre, I have shown that race and ethnicity is embedded in our culture and how this show has communicated race through its depiction and even exclusion. I have also shown how the audience and key players have interpreted these depictions and in some cases, how they have challenged the depiction. Here, I provide possibilities to extend this research and provide concluding remarks.

Future Research

This area is ripe for future study. Since the focus is on just one RTV program it is not possible to generalize to other types of programming though at least preliminarily there is evidence that the same themes of race as an individual issue and the tropes employed by TRW are also found in other programs. More importantly, it is my hope to extend this research to hear what other fans have to say about the show. My initial prediction would be that there would be differences in age in terms of viewing of the show. There are several ways to accomplish this goal. One way to accomplish this would be to utilize an open-ended electronic survey instrument that seeks to focus on the specific research questions of this project. Similar to Ang, I too would identify as a fan and also solicit for other fans of the show. Another way to accomplish this goal is to move from my “lurker” status to a bonafide member of the message boards in which

these matters are discussed. Admittedly, I had been very conservative in my involvement with these boards and blogs because I treated this as the initial step in the process. Now that I have uncovered some of the overarching themes presented in the show, I can then explore what other viewers and fans are also saying about those themes and whether they would agree and in what ways they might disagree.

What is perhaps also quite intriguing about this particular project is that there is also a body of texts that have been produced by the cast members themselves. Several cast members have written books that have dealt with their experience on the show such as Kevin Season 1 New York and Joe Season 5 Miami¹². Other cast members have written about their own personal life experiences such as Chris Season 11 Chicago. Sometimes what is written is not in the form of a book at all as in the case of Melissa Season 9 New Orleans that I mentioned earlier as a participant who has criticized producers for not only her own representation but for the representations of others. In addition to these examples, because of the use of social media many former participants have their own websites, blogs, or tweet messages. In the most recent season of TRW, the cast is asked about tweets that were sent out between the cast members though it is unclear what the actual content were of those messages. Relating specifically to the concerns of this project herein, Julie and Melissa both of Season 9 New Orleans continued their discussions on race via a “blog war” (Dehnart 2002b). Because so much

¹² I have included an appendix with the cast members by season where I have included some information on what cast members are doing after their appearance on TRW, including but not limited to books written.

has been written by the participants themselves this highlights another extension of possibilities for future research.

Analyses could also be replicated on *The Challenge* series since this show utilizes cast members from both *TRW* and *Road Rules*. This is particularly fruitful regarding *RW/RW Challenges* since it draws so significantly from the cast of *TRW*. Here it would be useful to showcase the awareness the cast members bring into the shows regarding their portrayals. Several cast members have discussed returning to compete in the *Challenges* specifically to challenge a portrayal from a previous season. Though, I am certain the cash prizes awarded to contestants are also a draw. Additionally, the same type of discourse analysis could be repeated on *TRW*'s spin-off, *Road Rules*. Further analyses could then help frame the show and its spinoff within the context of the entire network since reality shows now fill much of its programming. Arguably though these shows would fall under the umbrella category of RTV, each serves a different purpose. For example, *True Life* is different from *16 and Pregnant* which is different still from *Jersey Shore*. These differences are not just because the shows themselves are different but the styling, the portrayals, and perhaps their goals are also different for each of these shows.

Finally, I believe that the project could be expanded to explore the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In Season 1 New York, after an issue between Kevin and Eric, Kevin decides to write Eric a letter in which he makes reference to the fact Kevin “was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth” nor was he born with a doctor or NBA referee father in the house. In the same letter he states “the

black-white thing is always there” (1992 Season 1 New York Episode 5). While Kevin’s portrayal is largely framed as problematic due to his focus on race, clearly he himself acknowledges the link between race and class in society, a theme that just is not explored by the producers to the extent that other intersections are, however problematically.

Concluding Remarks

As I explained in Chapter I the purpose of this study was to seek out the patterns in the construction of race by using an exemplar of this genre, MTV’s *The Real World*. RTV presents a unique time in media due to the ubiquitous nature of RTV programming. As more and more long-running shows are canceled even while receiving critical acclaim, they are most often replaced by some form of RTV.

Often, a critical stance against RTV is taken by individuals, researchers or not, such as Pozner (2010), about the limited portrayal of groups of interest ranging from the portrayal of women, racial and ethnic minorities, or people with disabilities. Admittedly, though TRW reportedly is responsible for groundbreaking television, it seems it has reduced the nature of difference to simply a matter of individual understanding ignoring the complex nature of how race, class, gender, sexuality, and identity are embedded into the social structure of society. The show at once attempts to cling to claims of diversity which exists in casting but producers cannot show so much diversity that any conflict would not have a neat resolution. Repeatedly what we are shown is that all issues – personal or interpersonal – can be overcome through individual understanding. As such they provide the prescription for how we, too, are to deal with

such issues. We learn that accusations of racism are in fact serious and should only be made in the rarest of circumstances or when he/she can prove them, such as in the case of Omarosa. Accordingly when, for example, a minority member may not be patient with an individual who makes a seemingly racial remark, it is the minority member who has not remembered the script and therefore it is *still* their problem.

While these critics may be right, it is still of the utmost importance to understand these depictions on RTV especially given their popularity and ubiquity. Fundamentally though the exposure may be slanted, one-dimensional, or even shallow, these depictions may be the audience member's first encounter with a person from that group. In any given season we have witnessed some instances of very explicit discussions about race while in others only cursory discussions about race. For example in Season 1 New York issues of race are discussed immediately in the first episode but in Season 25 Las Vegas there is no outright discussion on race. Arguably this is due to Dustin's involvement with a gay porn website prior to his involvement with TRW so any discussions featured about the roommates involved their views on issues of homosexuality. The frames and storylines discussed by Bonilla-Silva were present throughout the show itself either through the comments made by the cast members themselves or in instances through the producers' decisions to simply ignore the facts. For an example of the latter we return to Season 25 Las Vegas.

While there was no outright discussion on race throughout Season 25 Las Vegas but this does not mean that race was not present. I have discussed earlier how vocabulary was utilized (see page 150). Here, we turn our attention to an instance

involving Leroy, a Black, 25-year old garbage collector living in Dallas but originally from Detroit. In the last episode of the season (2011 Season 25 Las Vegas Episode 13), he receives word a friend has been killed. His friend Vince who relays the news to Leroy explains, “Brandon got killed by the police.” He continues, “He had a gun. The police stopped him. They told him to get on the ground. He was moving the gun to lay down. They shot him up, man.” Leroy is obviously affected by the death of his friends. The roommates are also concerned about him since he is crying and they have never seen him “this way”. While the show focuses on his loss of a friend, the show ignores the serious racial issues surrounding his death. In the same episode, Leroy and Mike are discussing his grief when Mike states, “I can’t even imagine how you’ve got to be feeling right now. To lose a close friend and not even know why has gotta be a tough thing to digest.” Leroy responds, “I could never understand why this happened. You know what I mean? It’s just . . . it’s crazy man. Life is crazy.” Though the scene ends with a discussion on how short life is and how important friends and family are, Leroy says that he is angry as well. While we do not know the racial background of Leroy’s friend nor do we learn the circumstances of his friend’s death, being killed by the police is a serious matter – one with a skewed racial history – that deserves serious attention. Yet, once Leroy returns from the funeral (which is not shown), there is no more discussion of this matter by neither him nor the roommates.

Again, here I think it is important to understand that every single piece of footage that is aired has gone through a process where it is deemed important enough, since so little of the vast amount of footage available to the producers is shown compared to what

is filmed over the several month time period. Thus, including the conversation in which the audience is made aware that his friend had a gun, together with the fact that Leroy himself is Black, is representative of just one of the ways in which race is handled implicitly on the show. While there is no explicit statement that his friend is Black, I believe the audience is led to believe that he is Black simply because Leroy is as well. I believe also that by including this in the show, this might lead the audience to implicitly make the association that the individual who had the gun was at fault for this shooting. This is especially true when so little information is provided about the incident. Last, by framing the incident and storyline around his personal loss and about his desire to “live life to the fullest”, the producers are able to avoid the complex issues of the relationship between Blacks and police brutality (for an example see Smith 1992). Furthermore when Leroy returns for the reunion show that has now become part of every season, there are no questions to follow-up on this incident at all.

Repeatedly the characters that are selected for the show are selected not because they offer a window into a community not regularly shown on television. Rather, they are selected to maximize conflict for purely dramatic and entertaining purposes. Further it is also the producers who have control of the images that are represented. In their work on whiteness in movies, Vera and Gordon find,

The changing representations are political in the sense that they are related to the distribution of power and privilege in the United States. The new images apparently recognize the humanity of minority groups but actually misrecognize the true relations between minorities and whites. White hegemony has to remain hidden at all costs. Whites, who have the power and cultural capital to implement racist practices, also array considerable resources to deny its existence (2003:187).

As such, it is tempting to simply chalk up the images and storylines on TRW as guilty of purposely manipulating the storyline for the purpose of maintaining white privilege on the part of the producers. I do not however believe that it is simply this easy. My argument is that much like the cast members who are appearing on the show, the producers bring into the situation a body of knowledge that is drawn from the social world they know. The portrayals of individuals have not always been positive and the treatment of race, or difference for that matter, has not always fully fleshed out the intricacy of its true nature. For this reason it may be tempting to paint all producers as evil manipulators, exploiting difference.

However to do so would be too easy, for, the images that are presented on TV are just one part of a complicated structure of society. TRW has in fact been instrumental in offering a view into individuals we may have not otherwise known. It is TRW who has offered us Pedro, who in addition to the nation an opportunity to discuss issues of sexuality, also offered an opportunity to discuss race. More recently, TRW has offered us in the same season (Season 21 Brooklyn) the first transgendered cast member featured on the series run and a soldier who is called back to duty. As the season progresses it is fascinating to watch Katelynn learn the subtle nuances of femininity that quite possibly came from her living with three other females in the TRW house. Additionally, we watched as Ryan goes from being incredibly ecstatic that Obama wins the presidency because he is convinced this will end the Afghan and Iraq wars to being completely devastated when he learns he has been called back to duty.

In dealing specifically with matters of race and ethnic relations, the show often stumbles upon moments of humanity that reveal, perhaps unintentionally, certain truths about our society. Kameelah Season 6 Boston reveals to the confessional that she is exhausted by having to educate people about her race. She is annoyed with Sean and no longer wishes to serve as an ambassador to his understandings of race. While some may view this as a close-minded individual, others may be sympathetic to this view as members of various minority groups often have to serve as spokesperson and representative of that group. Since Sean has recently been elected to Congress his antics on the show have recently resurfaced including the fact that in one episode summary it is discussed that he and Kameelah had a heated discussion on race, (1997 Season 6 Episode 15).

Sean was perhaps among the least obnoxious and thus the least memorable in terms of his politics, and is probably best remembered as the lumberjack. However, a recap of that season reminds us that he and Kameelah fought about race in one episode in which, according to MTV, ‘Sean tells Jason that Kameelah is racist and compares her to Hitler’ (2010j).

Instead of highlighting the complexity of issues of race, and otherness, for that matter the show is reduced to concepts of various groups as “good” or “bad” and “willing” or “unwilling”. Because of the use of non-actors, there is less control from the producer over the message created once the cast member has left the show. As such the cast member is able to contest not only their own portrayal but the representation of other cast members and events that took place. Because of this and the prevalence of convergence culture, the dialogue between and among audience and cast member can

continue well past the season. As I mentioned earlier, part of the competition that now takes place can, and often is, over interpretation of message. The competition is between audience members who interpreted events in one way, cast members who lived or experienced one way, and producers who filmed it and portrayed it in another way. This is relevant in the discussion of race because the competing dialogues contribute to the continuing and ongoing discourse of race and how it is framed both within the show and subsequently within society.

Though I positioned myself as scholar-fan since I was a fan of the show long before I became a sociologist, I found myself so often almost on the verge of auto-ethnography¹³ as I reviewed the episodes and information. Dorothy Smith writes, “Social reality is not external to she who experiences, makes, or observes it” (1990:53). In my viewing of reality television, though I am a fan, I am also critic. I remember vividly once when I had my hair straightened due to a miscommunication with my hairstylist. As a graduate student at the time I remember vividly getting compliments from professors, even a professor of color, about how nice my hair looked. Remember that in Brittini’s (Season 20 Hollywood) cast bio we learn that she “grew up confused about being mixed race but recently started wearing her hair more naturally”. Wearing one’s hair “naturally” then serves as purposeful and oppositional stance that specifically relates to women of color. I then am forced to ask myself, is spending hours straightening my hair a signifier that I have internalized the standard of beauty that says white hair is desired? By choosing not to do so, am I purposively challenging the status

¹³ For an example of autoethnography in relation to multiracial identity see Gatson 2003. For an example of autoethnography in relation to race and RTV see Boylorn 2008.

quo or am I simply choosing to save myself time in the morning? Sadly, the producers did not explore the complexity of any of these issues. Though I do not think it was necessarily because the producers did not feel that this was worthy but perhaps because they simply could not understand something they have not themselves experienced. Or it may simply be an issue that could not easily be wrapped up within a thirty minute or even one hour story arc.

After having watched this show for nearly two decades and in telling people what I am working on for my dissertation, people often relegate my project to simply a matter of justifying my own television viewing. Many are often comfortable telling me I watch much more TV than any “normal” person should be viewing. However it is precisely because of this fact that makes this phenomenon so important to study. Precisely at the moment that audiences are tuning in to watch what is perceived as pure entertainment, is when a lesson on race is at hand. In a recent episode of *Survivor* (Redemption Island) Phillip interprets Steve’s comments towards him as being racial in nature. At the tribal council, the host, Jeff Probst is able to articulate the sentiments that each participant was bringing into the situation. Dehnart summarizes the event, “It’s remarkable that an intelligent conversation about race could emerge from some ridiculous behavior in the middle of a game that literally had its contestants spin in a circle to get dizzy before assembling a puzzle” (2011b).

As this dissertation has shown by uncovering the patterns of what is easily dismissed as “entertainment”, we are uncovering perhaps the most insidious of the messages being sent to audiences: that these messages are easily dismissed. Certainly

TRW has far-reaching effects having enough ratings to continue into at least Season 28. More importantly as fans become producers we are uncovering even more about what is in our consciousness about race, which is perhaps the most telling of all things to come from this research. Precisely, because any individual (audience member, fan or otherwise) can become a participant and a cast member/participant can become a producer, he/she can exert some control over the message.

Recently MTV has become known for another reality show which continues to be a ratings blockbuster for the network, *Jersey Shore*. Part of what has propelled this show to such high ratings is the amount of controversy this show received even before it began airing. The show received criticism primarily for its cast of self-proclaimed “guidos” and “guidettes” though the show is awash in criticism and Daniel Cappello, executive director of the Jersey Shore Visitors and Convention Bureau is quoted as saying, “The program certainly depicts the Jersey Shore as a culturally vapid place and doesn't make it appealing to anyone outside the demographic [MTV] is showing” (Friedman 2009). Many Italian Americans have found the depictions to be insulting and many critics have argued that the show has simply gone too far – especially when one considers that at least two of the cast members, JWoww and Snooki, are at times claimed as Latinas in certain media.

What few realize is that the executive producer of this show, Sally Ann Salsano, is herself a product of RTV. Salsano, responsible for the highest viewership of the network, was a finalist for the Miami season of TRW. In an interview she said she is “a huge fan of reality TV. There's not a show that I don't watch. I don't watch it for

research, so I can see what the competitors are doing. You know what? I f***** love every second of it” (Dehnart 2011a). She continues, "Whatever it is, I love reality TV. I'm always drawn to the characters, their reaction, and how they perceive the world. And I think that's what makes life interesting (Ibid)." Furthermore Salsano maintains that she is not showing a stereotype of Italian Americans on TV, rather she is simply showing viewers her own experience as an Italian American. Salsano then exemplifies this process of fan becoming producer and expanding the message to show a group of interest, (in this case a particular ethnic group) regardless of the debate of the quality of the content.

Indeed, TRW’s reach has extended in ways no one would have predicted in its debut. Not only has the show itself injected its DNA into the formulaic construction of the entire RTV genre, it has injected itself into the national discourse on race – its construction, its portrayal, and its representation. Thus, understanding the ways in which race and ethnicity is treated within the show, we also gain understanding into how race is embedded within our culture.

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APPENDIX A

INDEX OF CAST MEMBERS BY SEASON¹⁴Season 1 New York1992

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Andre was described as the “prototypical Gen-X guy” in a band, *Reigndance*, and as having divided his time between Detroit and New Jersey.

Becky is 24 and described as “at a crossroads in her life” who aspired to be a folk singer. Becky appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*.

Eric is described as a “charismatic young model straight out of Jersey”. Eric appeared in *Road Rules: All Stars* and *Battles of the Sexes II*. Eric Nies experienced a great deal of post show notoriety including serving as host on MTV’s *The Grind* and roles in movies such as *Above the Rim* and *The Brady Bunch*. More recently he appeared on VH1’s reality series *Confessions of a Teen Idol* (tvsquad.com).

¹⁴ Photos property of and information based on bios and summaries from mtv.com. Links provided for main pages for each season. Main pages provide links to episode summaries and cast bios.

Heather B is a hip-hop artist with the group Boogie Down Productions. Heather appeared in *RW/RW Challenge 2000*.

Julie is 18, from Birmingham, and leaving Alabama for the first time ever.

Kevin is 25, and “a poet, writer and educator struggling to overcome many of the issues facing African American men in 1992”. Kevin Powell was a founding staff member and senior writer for *Vibe Magazine* and has published several books of poetry, essays, and political commentary. Most recently he is known for unsuccessful bids for the United States Congress in New York’s 10th Congressional District (tvsquad.com).

Norman is an artist and “the lone gay cast member”. He is described as adding “a lot of humor and heart to the show”. Norman appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons* and *The Gauntlet*.

Season 2 Los Angeles

1993

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 Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season2/cast.jhtml>
 Episode Summaries <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season2/episodes.jhtml>



In the opening credits of this show, the season is actually titled RW: California. It was not until season three that this season became known as RW: Los Angeles.

Aaron is 21 and a business/economic major at UCLA. Aaron is one of the few cast members who did not return for a ten year reunion of the show (Dehnart 2001).

Beth A. was described as both a lesbian and as a “soft-spoken gal” from Eugene, OR who replaced Irene after she married and moved out.

24-year old Beth was a graduate of Ohio State University, where she studied film, television and radio production. Beth appeared in *RW/RW Challenge Season 1*, *Battle of the Seasons*, *Battle of the Sexes*, *The Inferno II*, *The Gauntlet II*, *The Duel*, and *The Gauntlet III*. Beth Stolarczyk married in real estate developer Matt Cirello. However prior to this her involvement with the various Challenges made her one of the few early cast members who was still involved in the show so many years later (Dehnart 2008d).

David is 21 and a stand-up comedian originally from Washington, DC who had appeared on *In Living Color* before TRW. David returned to play “Mr. Big” in the first *RW/RR Challenge*.

Dominic is 24 and was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland. Dominic Griffin has held a variety of positions in the entertainment industry and as of 2008, was a music executive for Disney TV and Film (tvsquad.com).

Glen was chosen to live in the house after David is asked to leave. He is from Pennsylvania and lead singer of his band “Perch”.

Irene is 25, a Southern California native, and is Deputy Marshal for the Los Angeles County Marshals Department. Their wedding is one of the highlights of the series.

Jon is from Owensboro, KY who is taking a semester off from Belmont University in Nashville to pursue a music career in Los Angeles. Jon appeared in *Road Rules: All Stars*, *Battle of the Seasons*, and *The Inferno II*. Jon Brennan as of 2008 was working as a church youth pastor and still performed as a singer/musician (tvsquad.com).

Tami is 22 and from New York state. She works as an AIDS care specialist and is part of a four-girl R&B group. Tami Roman most recently appeared in the second series of VH1’s reality series, *Basketball Wives*.

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season2/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season3/series.jhtml
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According to the season summary, finding jobs becomes a major task for the housemates since four of the seven members are from outside the Bay Area.

Cory is 21 and a junior at the University of California, San Diego.

Jo was born in London, England, divorced, and living in Tahoe before TRW. Jo replaces Puck who is asked to leave the house. Jo appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: The Gauntlet II*.

Judd is 24, a cum laude graduate of the University of Michigan, who is a struggling animator/cartoonist. Judd Winick authored a book about Pedro Zamora and is an award-winning comic book artist and graphic novelist. He and Pam Ling were married in 2001 (tvsquad.com). They, and their two children, made a cameo in *Pedro*.

Mohammed is 24 and from the San Francisco Bay area. He is the lead singer of his band, "Midnight Voices". He is described as "a mellow, spiritual guy".

Pam is 26 and from Los Angeles, CA. She is a third-year medical student at the University of California, San Francisco. Pam Ling is a professor of University of California-San Francisco and married Judd Winick in 2001 (tvsquad.com). They, and their two children, made a cameo in *Pedro*.

Pedro is 22 and was born in Havana, Cuba. He came to the United States in 1980 in the Mariel boat lift. He is a gay man living with AIDS and works as an AIDS educator.

Puck is 25 and was born and raised in the Bay Area. He is a San Francisco bicycle messenger. Puck is described as “always stirring things up”. David “Puck” Rainey was asked to leave the house during his season. He was later featured on MTV’s *Cribs* and his wedding was a special episode of the *RW/RR Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*. He was set to appear on *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew* but withdrew before filming (tvsquad.com). In 2010, he and his son were significantly injured and hospitalized after an accident (2010b). He admits to drinking prior to his accident and was charged with driving while intoxicated (2010c).

Rachel is 23 and graduated from Arizona State University in December 1993 with a degree in International Relations and a Woodrow Wilson Graduate Fellowship. She is described as “an active Republican” and as a “rebellious Catholic girl”. Rachel appeared in *Road Rules: All Stars*. Rachel Campos met Sean Duffy (Season 6 Boston) after both appeared in the *All Stars Challenge*. The couple married and have six children. She unsuccessfully auditioned for *The View* but occasionally guest co-hosts. Currently she shares mothering tips on AOL Living’s Parentdish.com (tvsquad.com). In 2009, she published a book which she calls a “love letter” to at-home moms (Dehnart 2009c).

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Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season4/cast.jhtml
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The cast included cast members from the United States, Germany, Australia, and England as the show went abroad for the first time to London.

Jacinda is 22 and a native of Brisbane, Australia. She is a Paris-based model represented by the Storm modeling agency. Jacinda is one of the few cast members who did not return for a ten year reunion of the show (Dehnart 2001). Jacinda Barrett is now an actor and appeared in films such as *Ladder 49*, *The Last Kiss*, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, and *New York, I Love You*. In 2004, she married Gabriel Macht and had a daughter in 2007 (tv squad.com).

Jay is 19 and from Portland, OR. Jay was selected as a Presidential Scholar in recognition of his abilities as a playwright for a one-man show he wrote called “Bedroom”.

Kat is 19, was born in Alaska, and grew up outside of Tacoma, Washington. Kat is an anthropology major at NYU where she was awarded an academic scholarship to NYU for her fencing ability. Kat appeared in *RW/RW Challenge 2000*.

Lars is 24 and grew up in Northern Germany. He has been living in Berlin and working for an event and marketing agency while attending the University of Berlin.

Mike is 21 and a dedicated racecar driver who has been earning his stripes in America racing Formula 2000 cars. He is described as coming from a wealthy family. Mike appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*.

Neil is 24 and a graduate of Oxford University's Wadham College. He is described as taking time off from his PhD studies in experimental psychology to play in London with his band. Neil appeared in *RW/RW Challenge Season 1*.

Sharon is 20 and English. She is a singer/songwriter who performs with her jazz funk band. Sharon appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*.

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Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season5/cast.jhtml
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The cast was given the task of starting a business together.

Cynthia is 22 and works as a waitress to put herself through San Jose State. Cynthia appeared in *Road Rules: All Stars* and *Battles of the Sexes II*.

Dan is 21 and Dan had been the editor of the Rutgers student paper for two years. Dan appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Extreme* and *The Inferno II*. Dan Renzi is an entertainment journalist and has contributed to the *New York Post* and *Miami New Times*. Now he has his own blog, *How Was Your Day, Dan?* In 2004, he was arrested in what has been described as a “Pee Wee Herman-esque” “indecent conduct” arrest (tvsquad.com).

Flora is 24 and attended the Art Institute of Boston.

Joe is 25, a graduate business student at Fordham University in New York City, and owner of a small business, Computane Corp. Joe Patane published a book entitled *Livin' in Joe's World: Unauthorized, Uncut, and Unreal*.

Melissa is 22 and is a Miami local “who comes from a traditional Cuban family”. She is about to graduate from the University of Miami. Melissa Pardon lives in Los Angeles and appeared on the soap operas *Young and the Restless* and *Bold and the Beauty* (tvsquad.com).

Mike is 24 and described as having a “strong background in accounting and restaurant management”. Mike appeared in *RW/RW Challenge 2000*.

Sarah is 25 and a graduate of Indiana University. She is an editor at one of the country's leading comic book companies in La Jolla, CA.

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Cast bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season6/cast.jhtml
Episode summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season6/episodes.jhtml



The cast works with children in the first NSACA Pilot Accredited after school program in East Boston and travels to Puerto Rico for the first ever Real World/Road Rules Challenge.

Elka is 19, from Brownsville, TX and described as a “Mexican American beauty”. Elka appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons* and *The Gauntlet*.

Genesis is 20, from Gulfport, MS, and gay. Genesis appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Sexes* and *Battles of the Sexes 2*.

Jason is 24, from Boulder, CO, and a graduate from Hendrix college as a psychology major, who is a poet and spoken word artist. Jason appeared in *RW/RW Challenge Season 1*.

Kameelah is 19 and African-American. She is a sophomore at Stanford University studying human biology with a focus on women’s health issues. Kameelah appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Extreme*.

Montana is 21 and living in Manhattan. She is a “budding paleontologist-archaeologist” who most recently worked in the dinosaur wing of the Natural History Museum. Mike appeared in *RW/RW Challenge Season 1* and *The Gauntlet II*.

Sean is 25 and from Hayward, WI. He is described a “typical” Midwestern boy and a “true lumberjack” who was brought up in a strict Irish-Catholic family. Sean appeared in *Road Rules: All Stars* and *Battle of the Seasons*. Sean Duffy met Rachel Campos (Season 3 San Francisco) after both appeared in the *All Stars* challenge (tvsquad.com). The couple married and had six children. Sean recently was elected to Congress in Wisconsin’s Seventh Congressional District (Dehnart 2010j).

Syrus is 25 and from Santa Monica, CA. He attended the University of Hawaii on a basketball scholarship, majored in communications. Syrus appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Extreme*, *The Inferno*, *The Gauntlet II*, and *The Ruins*.

Main page <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season7/series.jhtml>
 Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season7/cast.jhtml>
 Episode Summaries <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season7/episodes.jhtml>



The cast was giving the task of working as “modulators” at alterna-rock 107.7 The End and though duties begin as promotional, the eventually lead to producing and hosting a live radio show.

David is 21 and grew up in what is described in “Boston’s tough neighborhood, Charlestown” but was recruited to the Virginia Military Institute on a tennis scholarship. David appeared in *RW/RW Challenge 2000*, *The Inferno*, and *The Gauntlet II*.

Irene is 24 and from Pleasant Valley, NY. She is battling Lyme disease and attending Geroge University which is the fourth school she’s attended. Irene McGee earned a masters degree in broadcast and communication from San Francisco State. She now tours colleges to lecture on media manipulations and reality-tv falsehoods (tvsquads.com).

Janet is 21, from Chicago, a junior at Northwestern University with a double major in broadcast journalism and international studies, and Korean American. Janet appeared in *RW/RW Challenge Season 1*.

Lindsay is 21 and from Aspen, Colorado. She is a junior at the University of Michigan. She was co-host of a radio show in her hometown and also created a radio news show for young investors. Lindsay appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*.

Nathan is 21 and from Chesterfield, VA. He is a fourth-year student at the Virginia Military Institute. He is described as a “southerner”. Nathan appeared in *RW/RW Challenge Season 1* and *The Gauntlet*.

Rebecca is 19 and from Charlottesville, VA. She is attending the University of Virginia. She is described as “an old-fashioned Victorian romantic” and “an extrovert”. Rebecca appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Extreme*. Rebecca Lord fronts the pop band becky which once had Keanu Reeves as its bass player (*tvssquad.com*).

Stephen is 20 and from San Diego, CA. He is majoring in business with a minor in African-American studies at the University of California at Berkeley. Stephen appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*. Stephen Williams was arrested in 2001 for prostitution and 2002 for stealing a car. At the 2008, *Real World Awards Bash* he revealed that he was indeed gay and engaged to partner Sheldon (*tvssquad.com*).

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Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season8/cast.jhtml
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Employment: Run a café and performance space and set up their own production company, Seven Strangers Productions.

Amaya is a 21-year-old graduate of UCLA from Oakland, CA. Amaya appeared in *RW/RW Challenge 2000* and *Battle of the Sexes*. Amaya Brecher co-hosts two astrological shows via webradio and podcast (tvsquad.com).

Colin is 19 and from Thousand Oaks, CA. Colin appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*. Colin is one of the few cast members who did not return for a ten year reunion of the show (Dehnart 2001). He published *A New Ladies Man: Getting the Girl* in 2003. According to a realityblurred blog post, comes out as gay in 2004 via his website (Dehnart 2004).

Justin is 21 and from Houston, TX. He is a second-year law student and teaching fellow at Harvard University, and a “politically active gay man”.

Kaia is 22 and from Chicago, IL. She changed her name from Margaret after living in Tanzania, and majors in African-American studies at UC Berkeley.

Matt is 22 and a native of Del Mar, CA. He is enrolled at UCLA where he's studying political science and sociology.

Ruth is bisexual and was raised in a foster home by a strict, Filipino family. She is the only native born Hawaiian and enrolled at Rutgers University. Ruthie has won awards for her freestyle rapping and performs spoken word poetry. Ruthie appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*, *Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Gauntlet II* and *The Duel II*. Ruthie Alcaide lives in Los Angeles and recorded a hip-hop/rap album. She now tours college campuses to speak to groups about diversity and alcohol awareness and appears in public service announcements in drinking (tvsquad.com). Though she claimed in an *Access Hollywood* interview that she was just being “21” and didn’t really have a drinking problem.

Teck is 22 and from Peoria, IL. He is described as being both the “son of a minister” and “a ladies man”. He hopes to become an entertainer, move into politics, and become a “positive black role model”. Teck appeared in *RW/RW Challenge 2000*. Tecumseh “Teck” Holmes hosted MTV’s hip-hop music countdown *Direct Effect*. He guest-starred on *Friends*, *NCIS*, and *The Hughleys*. He also had parts in the films *Van Wilder* and *First Daughter* (tvsquad.com).

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season9/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season9/cast.jhtml
Episode Summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season9/episodes.jhtml



The cast was assigned the task of co-producing and hosting their own cable access television program.

Danny is 22, from Rockmart, GA and is described as a “modern day James Dean” who engages in a “secret” relationship with a man in the military. Danny appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*. Danny Roberts appeared in an episode of television series *Dawson’s Creek* as a romantic love interest for female Andie (Dehnart 2000). He was cited as a role model by television star Neil Patrick Harris when Harris was coming to terms with his sexual orientation (Dehnart 2008c).

Davis is 22 and is described as “a sweet, vulnerable guy trying to run as far away as possible from the Chicago ghetto he grew up in”. David appeared in *RW/RR: The Gauntlet*.

Jamie is 22, from Wilmette, IL, and is described as having grown up on Chicago’s privileged North Shore. He is also described as a web-based entrepreneur who developed Soulgear.com, an online extreme sports outfitter, with his friends. Jamie appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Extreme* and *The Gauntlet II*.

Julie is 21, from Delafield, Wisconsin, and a student at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Julie is described as having “lived a remarkably sheltered life”. Julie appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Extreme, Battle of the Sexes, The Inferno, The Inferno II*, and *The Gauntlet II*. Julie Stoffer was expelled from BYU for appearing on the show. She married a fellow Mormon in 2004 and is now a host of G4 Network’s *Electric Playground* (tvsquad.com).

Kelley is 21 and from Fayetteville, AR. She is described as being “blessed with stunning beauty and cunning charm”. Kelley appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*. Kelly Limp moved to Los Angeles to work in TV marketing. She married *Party of Five* television star Scott Wolf in 2004 (tvsquad.com).

Matt is 21 and “the rural southern hamlet” of Hiawasee, GA. He is enrolled at Georgia Tech and is described “a straight-edge religious hipster who loves graffiti art, break dancing, hip-hop culture, and customizing his souped-up Honda”. Matt appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Gauntlet*.

Melissa is 22 and from Tampa. She is described by a friend as “a half-black, half-Filipino Chris Rock”. Melissa appeared on *RW/RR Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*. Melissa Howard is now Melissa Howard Beck after marrying musician Justin Beck in 2007. She worked on *The Jamie Foxx Show* and starred in Oxygen sketch comedy series *Girls Behaving Badly*. She also appeared in 2005’s *Battle of the Network Stars* on Bravo. She currently has her own blog, Princess Melissa (tvsquad.com).

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season10/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season10/cast.jhtml
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The cast is appointed as a marketing street team for Arista Records.

Coral was raised in the Bay Area and described as being as intelligent and witty as she is beautiful. Coral appears in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*, *The Gauntlet*, *The Inferno*, *Battles of the Sexes II*, *Fresh Meat*, and *The Gauntlet III*. Coral Smith is described as the RW veteran having participated in various *Challenges*, reunions, blooper reels, and as host of episode marathons. She was Melissa Howard's roommate before Melissa moved to New York with her now husband (tvsquad.com). In 2007, she comes out as a lesbian (Dehnart 2007).

Kevin is from Austin, TX and was diagnosed with testicular cancer as a senior in high school.

Lori is from Roseland, NJ and is described as having a "striking mixed heritage--Filipino and Irish". Lori was one of the lead vocalists in a Boston College singing group called the Bostonians. She was the winner of the MTV.com Online Casting and beat out four other finalists to win a spot at the finals. Lori appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*.

Malik is from Berkeley, CA and described as “the biracial son of a white mother and a black father”. Attending the “prestigious” University of California at Berkeley, he is the first child in his family and only one of his friends to attend college. He is also “a popular Bay Area club/party DJ”.

Mike is from Parma, OH in what is described as “a predominantly white middle-class suburb of Cleveland”. Mike is described as “the quintessential all-American boy”. Mike appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Seasons*, *The Gauntlet*, *The Inferno*, *Battles of the Sexes II*, and *The Inferno II*. Mike Mizanin won a reality-star episode of *Fear Factor*, a competitive reality program, with ex-girlfriend Trishelle Cannatella (Season 12 Las Vegas). In 2003, he debuted as the Miz. He now competes on the Raw brand as the reigning WWE United States Champion (tvsquad.com).

Nicole is from Atlanta. He is a graduating senior at the top of her Morris Brown University class. She is described as having a “mix of black and white roots”, remaining “proud of her African-American heritage” and only dating black men.

Rachel is an only child who was raised outside Chicago by her mother. She is described as “wide-eyed, bubbly, and ready for life”. Rachel appeared in *RRW/RR: The Gauntlet*.

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Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season11/cast.jhtml>
Episode Summaries <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season11/episodes.jhtml>



The cast was given different assignments for the Chicago Park District.

Aneesa is described as a lesbian and product of interracial marriage. Aneesa appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*, *Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Gauntlet II*, *The Duel*, *Inferno III*, and *The Duel II*. Aneesa is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Cara is described as having grown up in the suburbs of Boston, MA as a middle child of upper middle-class Jewish parents.

Chris is described as gay and also a recovering alcoholic from Massachusetts. Chris Beckman published a book entitled *Clean: A New Generation of Recovery* in 2005.

Keri is described as “born to a beautiful Hispanic woman and a descendant of New Orleans politics” who went to school in Memphis and aspires to work for the FBI.

Kyle was born to a Midwestern family and is described as being “on the track to become the all-American golden boy”. Kyle was named high school football player of the year and got into Princeton University though became involved in theater at Princeton. Kyle Brandt played Philip Kirakis on *Days of our Lives* from 2003 to 2006 (tvsquad.com).

Theo is an only child and the son of a pastor. He is pursuing an architecture major in college. Theo appeared in *RW/RR: The Gauntlet*.

Tonya was born in the Pacific Northwest. She began attending EMT and Nursing School. She is described as having a “Baywatch body” and a “Barbie doll exterior”. Tonya appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battle of the Sexes*, *The Gauntlet*, *Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Inferno II*, *Fresh Meat*, *Inferno III*, *The Island*, and *The Ruins*. Tonya Cooley has appeared in several RTV programs including *Kill Reality* and *Celebrity Paranormal Project*. She has also appeared in a Playboy spread and on Cinemax’s series *Erotic Traveler* (tvsquad.com).

Season 12 Las Vegas

2002 – 2003

Main page <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season12/series.jhtml>
 Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season12/cast.jhtml>
 Episode Summaries <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season12/episodes.jhtml>



The cast was employed as club promoters. In a RW first, this cast was brought back for five years after their first season for a special series, *Reunited*. Main page: http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-reunited_vegas/series.jhtml

Alton appeared in *RW/RR: The Gauntlet*, *The Gauntlet II*, and *Inferno III*. Alton and Irulan (Season 12 Las Vegas) moved in together after the series ended but broke up shortly thereafter.

Arissa is described as “half-black, half-Italian firecracker”. Arissa appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II*.

Brynn is described as a stunning blonde and self-described party animal from a small town in Washington State.

Frank was born and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania. Frank appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II* and *The Gauntlet III*.

Season 12 Las Vegas

2002 – 2003

Irulan is described as having been “born to a white mother and a black father” and attends the Parsons School of Design. Irulan appeared in *RW/RR: The Gauntlet*.

Steven is in the midst of divorce proceedings and works as a topless bartender in a popular Texas gay bar. He is described as “very picture of all-American charisma and good looks”. Steven appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes 2*. Steven Hill had a major role in *The Scorned* a horror film whose cast members and writer hailed from RTV. He married model/designer Donna Katz in 2007 (tvsquad.com).

Trishelle was “raised in a small, ultra-conservative town in the bayou of Louisiana”. She is described as “notoriously charming and beautiful”. Trishelle appeared in *RW/RR: The Gauntlet* and *The Inferno*. Trishelle Cannatella has made several appearances on RTV programming including *The Surreal Life*, *Kill Reality* and *Celebrity Poker Showdown*. She also appeared in *The Scorned* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. She also posed nude for *Playboy* (tvsquad.com).

Main page <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season13/series.jhtml>
 Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season13/cast.jhtml>
 Episode Summaries *none provided*



The cast is assigned to work as travel writers on Frommer's "Official Guide to Paris"

Ace is a senior marketing major at Georgia Southern University in his sixth year of college. Ace appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno*, *Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Gauntlet 2*, and *Inferno 3*.

Adam is a graduate of Stanford University with a degree in Communications. Adam appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Gauntlet II*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Duel II*, and *The Ruins*. Adam is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Christina is a criminal justice graduate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas who is the child of a biracial relationship.

“CT” (Chris) is pursuing a degree in Business Management at the University of Massachusetts. CT appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno*, *The Inferno II*, *The Duel*, *Inferno 3*, *The Gauntlet III*, and *The Duel II*. CT Tamburello was disqualified for punching and fighting with another cast member in one of these appearances on the *Challenge* (tvsquad.com). CT is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Leah is a Long Island, New York native who just graduated from the University of Maryland. Leah aspires to start a fashion career in NYC. Leah appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno*.

Mallory is 19 and is a freshman at Iowa State. Mallory appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno*. She also appeared in a *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue (Dehnart 2005a).

Simon is a native to Ireland and lives an “openly gay life”. He attends high school in a small village about an hour outside Dublin. Simon is a working model.

Main page <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season14/series.jhtml>
 Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season14/cast.jhtml>
 Episode Summaries <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season14/episodes.jhtml>



The cast was employed as crew members for Next Level Sailing.

Brad is described as a “muscular Italian” and as having graduated with an accounting degree. Brad married Tori, a RR cast member. He appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Inferno II*, *The Gauntlet II*, *The Duel*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Duel II*, *The Ruins*, and *Cutthroat*.

Cameran was born and raised in Anderson, SC with a “picture-perfect upper class family” and is described as a “Southern belle”. Cameran appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II* and *The Gauntlet II*.

Charlie is an 18-year-old and was born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia who aspires to be a famous musician. Charlie replaces Frankie when she leaves the show early.

Frankie is a certified masseuse who was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis at the age of three. Frankie Abernathy left the show before the end of the season and died in 2007 at the age of 25 from complications caused by cystic fibrosis (tvsquad.com).

Jacquese was born in Paterson, NJ and described as having been “teased in the past for somewhat resembling ‘Urkel’”. Jacquese appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II*.

Jamie is described as “raised by first generation, traditional parents in San Francisco” and as being as a “young woman of Korean heritage”. Jamie appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno II*. Jamie Chung has appeared in several acting roles including TV shows *ER*, *Days of our Lives*, *CSI: NY*, and *Greek*. She also played the lead in ABC Family’s *Samurai Girl*. She also appeared in films such as *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* and *Grown Ups* (tvsquad.com). Most recently she was cast in sequel of *The Hangover* (Dehnart 2010i).

Randy is an “industrial artist” who is also the head security man at a hip Boston nightclub. He is described as being known for his “artistic talent and easygoing demeanor”. Randy appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes* and *The Gauntlet II*.

Robin is a "Coyote" at Coyote Ugly bar. She is described as a “wild party girl”. Robin appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Battles of the Sexes II*, *The Inferno II*, *The Gauntlet II*, *The Duel*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Island*, and *The Duel II*. Robin is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Season 15 Philadelphia

2004 – 2005

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season15/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season15/cast.jhtml
Episode Summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season15/episodes.jhtml



The cast worked for Jon Bon Jovi's Philadelphia Soul, an Arena Football team, on their community outreach program. They planned and build a playground for Northern Home, a local care center for troubled youth.

Karamo is from Houston and an African American whose parents are from Jamaica. He attended Florida A&M University where he majored in Business Administration and is living in Los Angeles where he worked at the Brotherhood Crusade in Los Angeles. Karamo appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno II*.

Landon is described as a "sports fanatic". He was on the waterskiing and wakeboarding teams at the University of Wisconsin. Landon appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno II*, *The Gauntlet II*, *The Duel II*, and *Fresh Meat II*.

Melanie most recently attended the University of California at Santa Cruz and hopes to become a high school English teacher.

MJ is a recent recent grad from Vanderbilt University where he majored in Human and Organizational Development where he was a star football player. He is described as “a good-looking, blond, hard-bodied Southern boy”. MJ appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: The Gauntlet II*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Island*, and *The Duel II*. MJ had a baby with another reality participant, Mandy Weaver, from the *Real Gilligan Island 2* (Dehnart 2006b).

Sarah was born and raised in Florida. She graduated from Emory University. She is described as struggling with her weight and having overcome an eating disorder.

Shavonda is “a beautiful African American” who was her high school’s first African American homecoming queen. She is putting herself through Grossmont Community College. Shavonda appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Inferno II*.

Willie is a gay Puerto Rican American and left home when he was 15 because his religious parents don’t accept his lifestyle. As a child he was a regular on children’s television show *Ghost Writer*.

Main page <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season16/series.jhtml>
 Cast Bios <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season16/cast.jhtml>
 Episode Summaries <http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season16/episodes.jhtml>



The cast is assigned to shoot, edit, and direct their own documentary on the South by Southwest Music Festival.

Danny is 21 and from Billerica, MA. Danny appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Fresh Meat*, *Inferno 3*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Ruins*, and *Fresh Meat II*. Danny Jamieson and Melinda Stolp (Season 16 Austin) married and split two years later (Dehnart 2010d).

Johanna is 21 and from Riverside, CA though born in Lima, Peru. She moved to the US when she was 11 and is described as “a stunning and fiery Peruvian”. Johanna appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Fresh Meat*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Island*, and *The Ruins*. Wes Bergman won *The Duel Challenge* and used the prize money to buy in Arizona and a bar in Los Angeles with Johanna but they later broke up. Johanna has competed in Miss Peru Universe 2008 (tvsquad.com).

Lacey is 23 and from Tallahassee, FL. She is described as “born into a house of ex-hippie parents turned devoutly religious” and having limited access to pop culture.

Melinda is 21 and from Germantown, WI. She is described as having “lived the classic tale of ugly duckling turned beautiful swan”. Melinda appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Fresh Meat*, *The Gauntlet III*, and *Cutthroat*. Danny Jamieson and Melinda Stolp (Season 16 Austin) married and split two years later (Dehnart 2010d).

Nehemiah is 19 and from Rancho Cucamonga, CA. He is described as being “forced to grow up quickly and become a survivor”. Nehemiah appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel*, *The Gauntlet III*, and *The Duel II*. Nehemiah is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Rachel is 21 and from Valencia, CA. Rachel is an Iraq War veteran who enlisted in the US military after realizing she had no money to pay for college. Rachel appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Inferno III* and *Gauntlet III*.

Wes is 19 and from Kansas City, KS. He is a junior at Arizona State University who hopes to start his own business. Wes appeared in *RW/RW Challenge: Fresh Meat*, *The Duel*, *The Ruins*, and *Fresh Meat II*. Wes Bergman won *The Duel Challenge* and used the prize money to buy a home in Arizona and a bar in Los Angeles with Johanna Botta (Season 16 Austin). After their breakup, he began dating KellyAnne Judd (Season 19 Sydney) (tvsquad.com). West is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season17/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season17/cast.jhtml
Episode Summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season17/episodes.jhtml



The cast is required to open and run Key West's first Mystic Tan Sunless Tanning Studio and were affected by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma.

Janelle is 23, from San Jose, CA, a graduate of San Jose State, and described as a "very independent", "one tough cookie", and as a "bi-racial beauty". Janelle appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Inferno 3* and *The Gauntlet III*.

Zach is 22, from Portland, OR, a communications grad from Lewis and Clark College, and is described as being "born into a close-knit Jewish family" who comes "from old money and old traditions". Zach appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Gauntlet III*.

John is 23, from Fullerton, CA, and a recent Penn State graduate. Johnny, aka Johnny Bananas, appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel*, *Inferno III*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Island*, *The Ruins*, and *Cutthroat*. Johnny is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Jose is 20, from Sunrise, FL, and raised in Brooklyn. He is in his junior year at Florida State University, holder of a real estate broker license, and owner of multiple rental properties.

Paula is 24 and from Meriden, CT. She graduated from Quinnipiac University and became a “corporate slave”. Paula is described as “still connected to her abusive ex-boyfriend” and as “battling body image issues”. Paula appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel*, *Inferno 3*, *The Gauntlet III*, *The Island*, *The Duel II*, *Fresh Meat II*, and *Cutthroat*. Paula Meronek gives talks at universities on body image and eating disorders. She also makes celebrity appearances at Student City’s spring break events in Mexico and the Caribbean (tvsquad.com). Paula is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Svetlana is 19 and from Richboro, PA. She is a pre-med student at Temple University. She is described as “a first generation immigrant”. Svetlana appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel*. Svetlana Shusterman appeared in a special episode of *My Sweet 16* in which she celebrated her 21st birthday with five parties in one weekend. She also appeared in a *Maxim* advertorial spread in 2006 (Dehnart 2006a). She currently gives college lectures on Jewish heritage, immigration, alcohol awareness, and diversity (tvsquad.com).

Tyler is 23 and from Minneapolis, MN. He is openly gay and a graduate of Tufts University. Tyler appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel*, *The Gauntlet III*, and *Cutthroat*. Tyler is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season18/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season18/cast.jhtml
Episode Summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season18/episodes.jhtml



The group is assigned to serve as Outward Bound counselors.

Alex is a 22-year-old Division I swimmer at ASU from Houston, TX. Alex appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Gauntlet III*.

Brooke is a 24-year-old from Nashville, TN and is described as “not your typical southern belle”. Brooke appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Gauntlet III* and *The Duel II*. Brooke LaBarbera traveled throughout the country as part of MTV’s Rock the Vote campaign (tvsquad.com).

Colie is a 22-year-old sorority president from East Brunswick, NJ. Colie appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Inferno III* and *The Island*.

Davis is 23 is gay and from Marietta, GA. Davis appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Inferno III* and *The Duel II*. Davis is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Season 18 Denver

2006 – 2007

Jenn is 22, from Martinez, CA, and was an Oakland Raiderette cheerleader. Jenn appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Inferno III*, *The Island*, *The Duel II*, *Fresh Meat II*, and *Cutthroat*. Jenn is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Stephen is 22 and originally from Sacramento. He attends Howard University. He is described as “a conservative Republican who is against gay marriage” and as “deeply religious”.

Tyrie is 23 and from Omaha, NE. He is described as being “the product of a strict and aggressive upbringing”. Ty appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Inferno III*, *The Gauntlet III*, and *The Island*. Tyrie is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/sydney/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/sydney/cast.jhtml
Episode Summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/sydney/episodes.jhtml



Ashli is 19 and a Georgia native from Orance County, CA. Ashli appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Island*.

Cohutta is 23 and is described as a self-employed “southern gentleman” who was born and raised in small-town Georgia. Cohutta appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Island* and *The Ruins*.

Dunbar is 22 and from Natchez, MS who enrolled in the military and now attends Ole Miss. Dunbar appeared on *RW/RR Challenge: The Island*, *The Duel II*, *The Ruins*, and *Cutthroat*. Dunbar Flinn later appeared on an episode of Playboy TV’s *Foursome* in an episode featuring RTV participants (Dehnart 2010h).

Isaac is 21, from Cleveland, OH, a student at the University of Arizona, and is described as a “handsome, lovable party boy”. Isaac appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel II*. Isaac Stout joined the UK’s *Big Brother* cast while visiting another houseguest but left after she was voted off the show just two days later (Dehnart 2009b).

KellyAnne is 22 and from Austin, TX. She is “self-described tease who craves the attention of men”. KellyAnne appeared *RW/RR Challenge: The Island* and *The Ruins*. KellyAnne Judd has had romances with Cohutta (Season 19 Sydney) and Wes (Season 16 Austin).

Parisa is 21 and from New York, NY. She maintained a perfect GPA at New York University. She is described as being “raised by loving but demanding Muslim parents who don't support Parisa's dream of being a singer/songwriter”. Parissa Montazaran pursued a music career and combined her Persian heritage and combined her Persian heritage with hip-hop and dance beats in her debut album *Intelegance* (tvsquad.com).

Shauvon is 24 and from Sacramento, California. She was a sex columnist for Sacramento State University's newspaper. She is described as both “an intellectual” and “more than just a buxom blonde bombshell”. Shauvon leaves Sydney early. She appeared *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel II*, *The Ruins*, and *Cutthroat*.

Trisha is 19 and from Fresno, CA. She is described as both “sharp-tongued party girl” and as having been “raised as a devout Christian by her adoptive parents”. Trisha leaves Sydney early after an altercation with fellow cast member Parisa, a violation of their contract.

Main page	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/hollywood/series.jhtml
Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/hollywood/cast.jhtml
Episode Summaries	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/hollywood/episodes.jhtml



All cast members were described as aspiring to the same goal: “achieving fame and fortune in Hollywood” as such they were left to pursue individual ambitions.

Brianna is 20 and a self described “Philly girl” from Philadelphia, PN and as having tried out for season 5 of American Idol. Brianna appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Ruins*. Brianna Taylor released two EPs (tvsquad.com).

Brittini is 22 and an aspiring model from Tempe, AZ who is described as someone who grew up “confused about being mixed race”. Brittani appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel II*.

Dave is 22 and from Waynesboro, PN who hopes to become an actor or TV host. Dave appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Island*.

Greg is 2- and from Daytona Beach, FL who is an aspiring model. He is the first Real World roommate to be selected by viewers, with almost 3 million online votes, who voted for "PrettyBoy" (aka "The Chosen One"). He beat out 20,000 “wannabe” roommates.

Joey is 24, “a true blue Chicagoan”, and “is haunted by his troubled past that was riddled with addiction” who hopes to become an actor. Joey Kovar leaves the season to undergo rehab at the producer’s urging. While he returns to TRW house, he leaves for good after realizing the environment was not conducive to recovery. He appeared on *Celebrity Rehab 3 with Dr. Drew*.

Kimberly is 24 and Columbia, SC. She is described as being “raised in a deeply religious household in a small town” and as having “Southern belle charm and naiveté”. Kimberly’s goal is to become host of an entertainment show. Kimberly appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel II* and *The Ruins*.

Nick is 23 and from New Rochelle, NY. He recently graduated from college and is pursuing a modeling career who hopes to become a TV host. Nick is described as a “Jamaican-born ladies' man”. Nick appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Duel II* and *The Ruins*.

Sarah is 21 and from Phoenix, AZ. She is a recent graduate from Arizona State University. Sarah is described as being both “a budding feminist” and as retaining “some strong conservative, traditional views”. Sarah hopes to become a broadcast journalist.

Will is 23 and from Detroit, MI. He worked as a DJ, performing at weddings, parties and bar mitzvahs. Will is determined to a “super-successful music producer”.

Main page http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/brooklyn/series.jhtml
 Cast Bios http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/brooklyn/cast.jhtml
 Episode Summaries http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/brooklyn/episodes.jhtml



First season to cast eight, rather than the usual seven, cast members. Also, instead of a job or activity each cast member will pursue their own individual dreams.

Baya is a 21-year-old from Salt Lake City, UT who aspires to be a professional hip-hop dancer.

Chet is a 23-year-old University of Utah frat boy who was raised in a strict Mormon family. Chet appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Ruins* and *Cutthroat*. He also has served as host of RW After Shows including Season 25 Las Vegas.

Devyn is 20, a Missouri native, and a winner of Miss Missouri Teen and America Teen pageants who aspires to be part of the entertainment industry.

JD is 22, gay, and a graduate from the University of Miami, with a degree in marine biology who at 18 became one of the youngest dolphin trainers in the world. JD appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Cutthroat*.

Katelynn is 24 and a native of West Palm Beach, FL where was raised by a “religious Italian family”. Katelynn appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Fresh Meat II*. Katelynn Cusanelli finished her gender reassignment surgery in Thailand one month before filming. She currently speaks across college campuses on LGBT issues, communication, and diversity (tvsquad.com). Katelynn is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Ryan is 23 and from small-town Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the army at the age of 17 and served in Iraq. Ryan is described as a “class clown who juggles his time between amateur filmmaking, guitar playing and pranking those around him”. Ryan enlisted in the Army after the attacks of 9/11 and TRW chronicles part of his struggle with PTSD. While on the show, Ryan learns that he has been recalled for another tour. He wrote a book chronicling his first experience in active duty (tvsquad.com).

Sarah is 22 and from San Francisco, CA. She is described as being in her first relationship with a man and surviving an “intense” past. Sarah appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: The Ruins, Fresh Meat II*, and *Cutthroat*. Sarah is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Scott is from New Hampshire and was raised in “broken home in Massachusetts”. He is the first in his family to graduate from college. Scott is an accomplished person trailer and hoping to break in the modeling industry.

Main page http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/cancun/series.jhtml
 Cast Bios http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/cancun/cast.jhtml
 Episode Summaries http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/cancun/episodes.jhtml



The cast worked with StudentCity.com to provide college kids a fun spring break.

Ayia is 21 and of Mexican descent. She is also the realworldcasting.com winner. Ayia appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Cutthroat*. While on the show, Ayia is revealed to be a ‘cutter’. According to her, the producers did offer help but she declined because therapy would have been filmed (Dehnart 2009a).

Bronne is 21 and from Yardley, PA who was on the Penn State varsity boxing team. Bronne is evicted from the hotel after throwing a fire extinguisher from the balcony but remains on the show after finding his own housing in Cancun.

CJ is 24 and is described as an “All American boy” from Boca Raton, FL and graduate of UMASS who is an NFL free agent punter. CJ appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Fresh Meat II*. CJ Koegel appeared in an episode of television series *Burn Notice* and makes appearances at events, at bars, hotels, casinos, and award shows (tvsquad.com).

Derek is 21, gay, and from Phoenix, AZ and was pursuing a bachelor's degree in Kinesiology at Arizona State University. Derek appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Cutthroat*.

Emilee is 21 and from South Hamilton, MA. Emilee appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Cutthroat*.

Jasmine is 22, from Friendswood, TX, as is described as a former competitive cheerleader. Jasmine is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Joey is 22, from Lawrence, MA, a guitar player in the pop punk band, Late Nite Wars. Joey was fired from the group's job at Student City and forced to leave the show early.

Jonna is 20, from Tempe, AZ, and described as a "multi-racial beauty". Jonna Mannion has been on Discovery's Channel's *Endurance* and an episode of MTV's *Engaged and Underage* (tvsquad.com). Most recently she appeared Tru TV's *Rehab: Party at the Hard Rock Hotel*. Jasmine is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Season 23 DC

2009 – 2010

Main page http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/Washingtondc/series.jhtml
 Cast Bios http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/Washingtondc/cast.jhtml
 Episode Summaries http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/Washingtondc/episodes.jhtml



Each cast member was allowed to pursue their own passions and goals

Andrew is a 21 aspiring editorial cartoonist from the suburbs of Denver.

Ashley is a “Portuguese beauty” who was an Obama delegate from Vegas.

Callie is described as a small town girl from a conservative Texas town who hopes to become a photographer.

Emily is 21, a Midwestern girl, and described as having been “raised in a fundamentalist Christian cult”. Emily appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Cutthroat*.

Erika is described as both a “melodramatic singer” and a “Windy City rocker”. Erika Lauren Wasilewski left the show the early. Later, news emerges that she faked cancer several years earlier to get sympathy from an ex-boyfriend (Dehnart 2010a).

Season 23 DC

2009 – 2010

Josh is 23, from Philadelphia, and described as a “Puerto Rican/Italian glam rocker/rapper” with “dreams of making it big in the entertainment industry with his punk funkadelic sound”. Joshua Colon and his girlfriend are members of the “creative team” of a show being pitched to networks called *Abusers* similar to A&E’s RTV program, *Intervention* (Dehnart 2010f).

Mike is described as coming from a Christian family and as “still questioning whether he's bi-sexual or gay”. According to his bio, Mike comes to DC to be an environmentalist, but unexpectedly finds the inspiration to help advance marriage rights for gay and lesbian Americans.

Ty grew up in Baltimore. He is a recent graduate of Trinity College where he played football and majored in economics. He is described as having a quick temper. Ty appeared in *RW/RR Challenge: Cutthroat*. Ty is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Main page http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/neworleans2/series.jhtml

Cast Bios http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/neworleans2/cast.jhtml

Episode Summaries http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/neworleans2/episodes.jhtml



Ashlee was the captain of her Division 1 basketball team at Northwestern University and grew up in a small New Jersey suburb.

Eric is a stand-up comic and holds a job at the State Department, traveling the globe briefing foreign service personnel on American policy.

Jemmye is from a “from a conservative Mississippi hometown” and is a “vocal supporter of gay marriage and legalization of marijuana”, and is described as someone who “has a preference for black men” which is scandalous in “her heavily Southern Baptist community”.

Knight is 23 and from Wisconsin. While on an athletic/academic scholarship at Arizona State University he suffered a severe shoulder injury and became addicted to painkillers during his recovery from his injury. Now struggling to remain clean, he is currently teaching hockey clinics to children and pursuing his marketing degree at the University of Milwaukee.

McKenzie is 21 and from Florida. She is a sorority girl attending the University of Central Florida and majoring in psychology. She is described as having a “pretty idyllic” childhood.

Preston is described as “a proud, young, gay, black man” who grew into a carefree individual despite his rough childhood.

Ryan is 21 and is described as “one of the most bizarre roommates in New Orleans”. He is a “legit hairstylist” who hopes to cut hair for rock stars and celebrities. Ryan leaves the show early after difficulties with his roommates.

Sahar is described as having growing up “in a conservative Arab community in Dearborn, MI”. She is a budding singer/songwriter. She is also described as a “strong-willed, liberal Muslim”.

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Cast Bios	http://www.mtv.com/shows/real_world/lasvegas/cast.jhtml
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The group is assigned various promotional activities with the casino.

Adam is 22 and a graduate of the University of Southern Maine with a dual degree in Criminology and Political Science from Portland, ME. Adam left the show early after being asked to leave by the hotel after destroying property due to drinking too much. Still, he reappears in several episodes because of his romance with fellow cast member Nany. Adam is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

“Cooke” (Heather Cooke) is a Division 1 soccer player who grew up in Maryland. Cooke replaces Adam after he is asked to leave the show.

Dustin is 24 and from Rayne, LA who is described as having “boyish charm and southern gentleman demeanor”. Dustin gained notoriety prior to TRW because he was a “cast member on a web site that featured an uncensored look at a house of attractive guys living together”.

Heather is 21 and from Delran, NJ. She is currently majoring in Communications and Information Technology at Monmouth University and hopes to have a career as a talk show host.

Leroy is 25 and from Detroit, MI. He has been working as a sanitation worker in Dallas for the past few years. He hopes to become an actor or personal trainer. Leroy is scheduled to appear on the upcoming season of *The Challenge: Rivals*.

Michael is 23 and from Nokesville, VA. He is described as having “put himself through college at the University of Maryland where he dual majored in Rhetoric and Agribusiness”.

Nany is 21 and from Jamestown, NY. She is currently pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice and wants eventually to become a parole officer. Nany is described as a “strikingly beautiful, Hispanic-American, sweetheart”.

Naomi is 22 and from Bronx, NY. She recently graduated college while becoming the president of a nationally recognized sorority and interning for several successful entertainment companies. Naomi is described as a “Hispanic firecracker”.

VITA

Name: Janie Filoteo

Address: Lone Star College-Tomball,
30555 Tomball Parkway,
Tomball, TX 77375

Email Address: filoteoj@yahoo.com

Education: B.A., Sociology and Psychology,
Our Lady of the Lake University, 1997
M.A., Sociology,
Our Lady of the Lake University, 2000
Ph.D., Sociology
Texas A&M University, 2011